

• A SON •
OF HIS
FATHER


HAROLD BELL WRIGHT

A SON
OF HIS FATHER

BOOKS BY
HAROLD BELL WRIGHT

THAT PRINTER OF UDELL'S
THE SHEPHERD OF THE HILLS
THE CALLING OF DAN MATTHEWS
THE WINNING OF BARBARA WORTH
THEIR YESTERDAYS
THE EYES OF THE WORLD
WHEN A MAN'S A MAN
THE RE-CREATION OF BRIAN KENT
THE UNCROWNED KING
HELEN OF THE OLD HOUSE
THE MINE WITH THE IRON DOOR
A SON OF HIS FATHER

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THEY SAW ON EACH SIDE THE THINGS OF WHICH THE YOUNG
RANCHMAN'S LIFE WAS MADE

A SON OF HIS FATHER

BY

HAROLD BELL WRIGHT

AUTHOR OF "THE MINE WITH THE IRON DOOR,"
"THE SHEPHERD OF THE HILLS," ETC.



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CHAPTER I

THE GIRL IN THE TOURIST CAR

WITH the right background and proper perspective, the most commonplace things of our everyday lives assume colossal proportions.

A westbound, overland train was somewhere between Kansas City and El Paso. Through two long, hot, dusty days a young woman in the tourist car had been, to her fretful fellow passengers, an object of curious interest.

Those who had been with her on the train from New York to Chicago knew that she had come from the great eastern city; but any one could see that New York was not her home. Slow-witted from their grimy discomforts, and indolent from the dragging hours of their confinement in the stifling atmosphere of the second-class coach, they wondered about her with many speculative comments. Who was she? Where was she from? Where was she going—and why?

Whenever the feeble attractions of a perspiring card game failed, the players invariably turned their

attention, with pointless jests, to that lonely figure in the queer-looking dress. One couple—a swagger man and a tawdry woman, who were improving their traveling hours with a cheap flirtation—made the bundle, which served the strange passenger as a traveling bag, a mark for their ill-concealed merriment. When book or magazine palled, the listless reader would stare at her until a flash of sea-gray eyes would send the intruding gaze guiltily back to the neglected page. At meal time or whenever the train stopped—as even a westbound overland must occasionally do—the common interest was transferred, but never for long. The usual stock remarks about the various sections of the country seen from the windows and the inevitable boasting comparisons with the various back-homes represented were exhausted. Political issues were settled and unsettled. The condition of the country was analyzed, accounted for, and condemned. But always, when every other point of conversational contact failed, that lonely young woman served.

And the young woman was as interested in the curious passengers—but with a difference. If she knew and cared that they were whispering about her, she was careful to show no concern. If she felt their laughter, she gave no sign, save perhaps a flush of color and an odd little smile as if she were trying to enjoy the joke.

As the long hours of the westward journey passed, and the towns and cities became smaller and farther apart, and the might of the land made itself more and more felt, the girl stole a wistful glance, now and

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then, at her fellow travelers. She was so alone. At times, as she gazed upon the broad rolling miles that now lay between the swiftly moving train and the distant skyline, there would come into her expressive face a look of bewilderment and awe, as though she were overwhelmed by the immensity of the scene. Again, there would be in her eyes a shadow of fear as though she were not altogether sure of what awaited her at her journey's end.

At the first station west of El Paso a deep-bosomed country mother with a babe in her arms came into the car and was conducted by the porter to a seat across the aisle and a little behind the young woman. From her window the girl had seen the stalwart, sun-browned, rancher husband and it was not difficult for her to picture the home life thus represented. As she watched the mother and child, her face was as if she shared their happiness.

In strange contrast to the hurried passing of the miles the slow hours dragged wearily by. The young woman now looked out upon a wide expanse of dun, gray desert lying between ranges of barren, purple hills. From rim to rim the earth lay dry and hot under a sun-filled sky which, in the blue vastness of its mighty arch, held no cloud. Save for the disturbing rush of the passing train she could see, in all the dun, gray miles, no moving thing. As far as the eye could reach, the only visible mark of human life was that thin, black thread of steel. The gaunt and treeless mountains were set as if to mark the awful boundaries of a forbidden land, but from east to west that curving line was drawn with a bold,

mathematical determination in daring defiance to the grim and menacing desolation.

Is it too much to say that these threads of steel constitute the warp of our national life as it is laid on the continental loom? And these fast flying trains—what are they but shuttles, weaving the design of our nationality? The factory villages and the mighty cities of our Far East—the farms and towns of our Middle West—the far flung cattle ranches and the wide ranges of our West—are these more than figures in the pattern of our whole? Consider then the threads that are carried by these swift train shuttles to and fro across the loom: planters, lumbermen, manufacturers, farmers, teachers, artists, writers, printers, priests, devotees of pleasure, slaves of the mill, servants of truth, enemies of righteousness—colored with every shade and tone of every race and nation in all this wide, round world.

But there were no luxurious, overland train shuttles for those hardy souls who first dared to go from east to west across the continent. Slow ox teams and lumbering wagons on dusty trails, under burning skies carried the human threads of that perilous weaving. Ah, but the quality of that old-fashioned thread! The strength, the courage, the conviction, the purpose of those lives that were firm spun on the wheels of adversity from the heroic fiber of the generation which first conceived the design of our nation! The weaving was slow, but the work endures. For us the warp was laid—to our hands came the shuttles—to us the unfinished pattern.

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But what of the quality of the thread which, in our generation, is being woven into this design, America?

Occasionally, now, the girl in the tourist car caught fleeting glimpses of human life in the seemingly empty and silent land—a red section house on the right of way, a dingy white blur of cattle shipping pens, a distant ranch house, a windmill with watering troughs, a pond where cattle came to drink, the lone shack of some hopeful homesteader. And then, with a long-drawn scream from the whistle and the grinding of brakes against protesting wheels, the headlong rush was checked and the train stopped.

From her window, the girl saw a cluster of unpainted shacks and adobe cabins, one street with three forlorn stores—hardware and implements, general merchandise, drugs and soft drinks—a dilapidated post office, a disreputable garage, a weather beaten hotel, and a tiny depot. From the station platform one might have thrown a stone in any direction beyond the city limits. Some two or three miles away a cloud of smelter smoke towered above a small group of low, black hills. A few natives—cowboys with fringed chaps and jingling spurs, Indians in the costume of their tribe, and town loungers in shirt sleeves and big hats—had gathered to witness the event.

Many of the passengers, excited as children over this break in the monotony of their journey, hurried from the coaches to snatch a breath of clean air while walking up and down the platform and “viewing the sights.” But these travelers, who were so

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alert to anything new or strange, failed to notice that which caught and held the attention of the young woman at the tourist car window. A little apart from the general gathering, a small company of men and women were grouped about a man who wore on his hat a wide band of black. The man's hat was old but the band of black was new. On a baggage truck near by there was a coffin.

The conductor, watch in hand, hurried from the station. He paused beside the man in mourning and with him and his friends stood watching as the truck with the coffin was moved toward the forward end of the train. Then the conductor raised his hand and turned: "All aboard," and the careless, sight-seeing passengers, with laughter and jest, rushed for the coaches. The girl at the window saw the hurried handshakes and the quick good-bys of the man's neighbors and friends while one of the women placed a tiny bundle of humanity in his awkward arms. The train started hurriedly as if impatient to be off and away to business of more importance. The porter conducted the man, with the new band of black on his hat and the baby in his arms, to a seat in the tourist car.

The man was roughly dressed but clean, with hands that told of heavy toil. His face was the face of a self-respecting laborer. His eyes were heavy with sleepless nights and with grief which he had no skill to hide. The porter's manner was marked by a gentle deference not usually accorded his second-class passengers. The other occupants of the car settled themselves in various attitudes of

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weary discontent—indifferent to anything but their own discomforts. The sea-gray eyes of the lonely young woman in the queer-looking dress were misty with tears.

The people who were privileged to sit on the rear platform of the observation car watched the lonely little town fade into the immensity of the lonely land. They saw that column of smoke above the group of low, black hills but gave it no thought just as they gave no thought to the generation that had so bravely laid the lines of steel over which their luxurious train shuttle flew so smoothly. Not one of them dreamed that their children, from the observation platforms of the future, would look upon a city there of which the nation would be proud. They did not know of the riches hidden in those bare, forbidding hills. They had no vision of the fields and orchards that would tame the wildness of the desert. They could not see the homes and schools that would come to be. With thought only for themselves and their little passing day they were as dead to the future of their country as they were indifferent to its history, and apparently cared as little for either the past or the future as they did for that coffin for which their train had stopped.

A train man passing through the car paused a moment beside the man with the baby and, as if he wanted somehow to help, adjusted the window shade. The conductor came, and his voice was kindly and sympathetic as he answered the man's low-spoken, anxious questions. And in the eyes of the watching girl a smile shone through the mist of tears.

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An hour or more passed. The man, holding the baby in his arms, sat motionless, gazing stolidly at the back of the seat before him. Many of the passengers dozed. The couple behind the girl talked in low, confidential tones.

Suddenly, above the noise of the train, came a wailing cry. The man with the baby started and glanced hurriedly around, with a look half frightened half appealing.

The cry came again—louder and more insistent. Several passengers stirred uneasily and looked about with frowns of annoyance. The man, with hoarse, murmuring voice and awkward movements, endeavored to quiet the awakened infant. The cries only increased in volume.

By now the passengers were turning in their seats with looks of indignant protest. A complaining voice or two was heard. The man, confused by the attention he was receiving and helpless to quiet his child, was pitiful in his embarrassment.

The swagger man and the tawdry woman exchanged remarks. A passenger across the aisle, hearing, concurred, and the man, thus encouraged, spoke in a tone which reached half the car: "If people can't take care of their darned kids, they've no business bringin' 'em on the train." His companion, in the same vein, supplemented his effort with: "It's outrageous—where's the squalling brat's mother anyway?"

The passengers who heard murmured their approval of this outspoken protest. The man with the crying baby glanced back over his shoulder in

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mute apology. The young woman, who had been the object of their careless comments and thoughtless jests, sprang to her feet and turning faced the two who had won the applause of the disturbed company.

"For shame!" she cried in a clear voice which was heard easily by those who had endorsed the sentiments of the couple. "Have you no pity in you at all? Or is it that your hearts are as cold as your eyes are blind?"

The swagger man grinned up at her with impudent boldness. His seat mate tossed her head. The startled passengers stared and waited with breathless interest.

With fiery recklessness the young woman continued: "There's no need of me askin' if you have any babies of your own—such as you would not—though 'tis to be supposed that you both have fathers and mothers of a sort. As for that poor little one's mother that you ask for, ma'am, you should know where she is—she is in the baggage car."

A sudden understanding fell upon the listening passengers. Eyes were lowered or turned away. Faces that were half laughing became grave and troubled. The pair before the girl hung their heads in shame.

A moment more and the anger went from her face. With a suggestion of a smile that was like sunlight breaking through a rift in stormy clouds, she said gently: "I ask pardon, ma'am and sir. 'Tis myself that is thoughtless. Of course it is only because

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you do not understand that you are so cruel. Forgive me," she favored the others with a knowing glance, "after all, everybody is just as human as they know how to be."

At this two-edged apology every face in the little audience caught the light of her smile, and the effect on the atmosphere of the car was magical. The guilty couple, to whom the apology was tendered, alone missed the point, but they smiled with the rest.

The young woman did not pause to note the effect of her words. Even as the light dawned upon the slower witted ones she was standing beside the distracted man who was so engrossed in trying to quiet the baby that he had scarcely noticed the rebuke administered to the complaining passengers. "Please sir, let me try," she said gently. "'Tis easy to see that you're near worn out with worry—poor man."

The father lifted up his face to her with the look of a stricken animal that can not understand why it should be made to suffer so. "I'm mighty sorry, Miss. I know we're disturbin' everybody, but it seems like I just can't do nothin'. I —" He again bowed his head over the wailing infant.

Then the man felt a light hand on his shoulder, and the girl was bending over him—her generous, loving soul shining in her sea-gray eyes. "I know—I know," she murmured. "But please, sir, let me have the little darlin'. Don't be afraid. 'Tis true I've none of my own—yet—but I know all about them just the same as if I had for 'tis me that's been mother to my own brother Larry since I was five and he was like your little one here. Is it a boy now? Of

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course it would be. I was sure it could be no girl from the power of his cry. 'Tis good lungs he has, which is as it should be, praise be to God."

She had the baby in her arms now and was crooning an Irish lullaby. The man's sad eyes were fixed upon her glowing face with wondering gratitude. The passengers, as they watched, smiled their increasing admiration. The baby continued to cry.

And then, still singing her low murmuring lullaby, and followed by the eyes of the passengers, the girl with the babe in her arms moved down the aisle of the car to the seat where the country woman was holding her own sleeping infant.

The woman smiled a welcome; and if there was a touch of matronly pride in the superior conduct of her own child, who could blame her?

"Poor little thing," said the girl, referring to the wailing infant in her arms, "would you just have a look at it, ma'am?" She lifted a tiny, claw-like hand. "See how 'tis nothing but skin and bones. And is yours a boy or girl?"

"Mine are all boys," returned the mother—pride mingling with her sympathy.

"All boys! What a grand thing it must be now to mother a brood of men. This one is a boy, too. But the poor little thing's mother is dead and gone, you see, and they're trying to raise him on a bottle, which by the look of him is doin' no good at all. We raised my brother on a bottle—mother bein' so weakly and not full-breasted like you—beggin' your pardon, ma'am, but Larry he took to cow's milk like a calf—he was that strong-stomached and healthy.

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Your little one there is a beauty now, isn't he? My—my—would you look at the fat little hands and the roly-poly cheeks and legs of him, and how he's sleeping with his little self as full as he can hold! 'Tis a wonderful boy he is, ma'am, and all because you've so much to feed him."

The woman's face beamed. "My last two was twins."

"Twins? Glory be! But sure 'tis plain to see how easy it would be for you to feed two." She bowed her head over the baby in her arms. "There, there, you poor little hungry darlin'—with the mother that bore you cold in her coffin." Suddenly she looked straight into the other woman's eyes and in a low voice that was filled with pity and horror said slowly: "'Tis plain starvin' to death he is, ma'am, no less." She paused an impressive moment. "And—" she added with a pleading smile which fairly glorified her countenance, "and you a mother with more than plenty for two."

Gently the woman laid her own sleeping child on the seat. Blushing with embarrassment because of the observing passengers she received the stranger's infant in her arms. The wailing cry died away in a queer little, gurgling murmur.

The girl looked triumphantly around at the beaming faces of her fellow travelers—proud of this vindication of her faith in the goodness of human kind. "He'll be all right now," she said reassuringly. "'Twas him that knew all the time what he wanted and had to have."

"God bless her dear heart," exclaimed a mother

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whose sons back home were in their college years. The man who had encouraged the rude remarks of the couple across the aisle wiped his eyes and blew his nose quite openly. The porter was one broad ebony smile of courteous attention. The swagger man, leaving his companion as if their affair had suddenly lost its flavor, paused on his way to the smoking compartment to offer the girl a stammering apology. Throughout the car there was a glow of friendliness, with low-spoken words of admiration for the young woman in the queer dress whose traveling bag was a "funny bundle."

When the girl carried the now sleeping babe back to the father, she said: "If you please, sir, I'll just sit down and hold him a little. 'Tis easy to see that you're near worn out, and I do so love the feel of a baby in my arms."

The man made room for her on the seat facing him, and tried in his awkward way to thank her.

"My name is Crafts—Milton Crafts."

"Thank you, sir, and mine is O'Shea—Miss Nora O'Shea."

Milton Crafts bobbed his head in polite acknowledgment of the introduction; and then for a few moments there was silence between them, while they both looked out at the whirling landscape.

Presently, as if she would turn him from brooding over his bereavement, the girl said: "'Tis a great country you have, sir,—with your cities and farms and homes and factories back there in the east, and all this room out here for to build more of the same."

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"It's big enough," he returned stolidly. "And where might your home be, miss?"

"Where else but in Ireland?" she returned, smiling. "'Twas in Kittywake, County Clare, that I was born, and there I lived, never leaving it for any place, until I started on my way to America where my home is to be, now, with my brother Larry—him that I raised as I was tellin' you."

"I live back there in Oreville," said the man simply. "I work in the mine."

"My brother Larry works on a ranch," she returned. "Our father was a teacher, and you can believe, sir, we was that poor we was often put to it to fill our stomachs with anything at all. But in everything save money, sir, we were rich. Father and mother—God rest their souls—wedded for love, do you see, and against the wishes of mother's family—they belonging in a small way to the gentry—and so, afterwards, they would have nothing to do with us."

"Uh-huh, I don't know so much about your gentry, as you call 'em over there, but if your mother's folks was anything like my wife's father, God help Ireland, I say."

"Amen to that, sir, and God help America if you have many such here, which I know you have not. 'Tis a wonderful land, sir, is America. My father used to tell us all about it. Many's the time we would say 'if only we could get to America, how happy we would be.'"

The man looked at her curiously—almost as if he suspected her of attempting a joke at his expense.

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"My wife took more after her mother—I'm going with her to Tucson now. Tucson was their home, you see, and her mother is buried there. I—"

"Tucson!—Is it Tucson you say? Why, man, that's where I am going myself—to be with my brother Larry—only Larry don't be in the town but on a big ranch, as you call it, somewhere near—Mr. Morgan's ranch it is. It's for him my brother works. Well, well, and it's to Tucson that you are going now with—with the little one!"

"Yes, ma'am, Jake Zobetser—he's my wife's father—is going to take the baby. My friends they all said it was best to let it go that way 'cause the little feller would have so much better chance with his granddad than he ever could with me. Jake, he's got all kinds of money. But I don't know—I wish I was sure I'm doin' right about it. It's kind of hard, sometimes, for a body to know just what is best, now ain't it, miss?"

"Indeed, and indeed it is that. Many's the time I've been put to it to know which way I should turn—with the mother sick and Larry left for me to raise."

"Your father and mother ain't living now, I take it?"

"No, sir, my father died of a fever when Larry was a lad, and mother went just before I left the old home to come to this country. 'Twas her that held me there so long. She was never well after Larry was born, and that's how it comes I had to be mother as well as sister to the boy. Well then, after father's sickness and death, mother got to be clean helpless. Larry and I did our best—he working in the quarry

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and me doing what I could with my needle besides nursing mother and looking after the home—but our best wasn't much, sir. And so, you see, whenever things were going harder than usual, we would just keep on dreaming of America and wishing we was there, where there's nothing like there is in Ireland to keep any one down, and everybody can have enough to eat and a real home—if they're the kind that wants it."

Again the man looked at her with that curious, half suspicious expression. "I've heard that kind of talk before," he said at last, grimly.

But Nora O'Shea, in her enthusiasm, overlooked the meaning of his remark. "'Tis no doubt you have, sir—and a grand thing it is to be said of any country. Well—and so, you see, when my brother Larry had a chance to come to America we said he must go. I stayed at home to take care of the mother, but it was understood between us three that when the time came I was to go to Larry and make his home for him."

"Your brother got him a good job, did he?"

"Indeed, and he did that. Larry is that kind of a boy—as I raised him to be. He was a year in New York and one in Philadelphia, and all the time sending home the money to keep the mother and me. And then he met Mr. Morgan—it was in Philadelphia, that was—and Mr. Morgan took him back with him to Arizona and gave him a fine place on his big ranch. But maybe you know Mr. Morgan?"

"No, I ain't never seen him that I know of. I've heard of the family though. It is one of the big

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pioneer ranches—Las Rosas, I think they call it. Jake Zobetser's got a place somewhere in that section of the country."

"That's it, sir—Las Rosas—that's it. Ah, but he's such a fine American gentleman, is Mr. Morgan! And that good to Larry and our mother and me—you could hardly believe. Larry's letters were full of him. It was from Mr. Morgan, you see, sir, that my brother got all the money we had to have when mother was nearing the end. It came just in time, too, thank God! And there was plenty to help her to go in comfort and to make a decent funeral such as she had a right to—with enough left to bring me to America. So here I am, where I've so long wished and prayed to be—and all because of Mr. Morgan being such a grand man, and that good."

"You're aimin' to live at the ranch with your brother, are you?"

"As to that, I don't know. But Larry will have it all arranged. There was no time, you see, for me to get a letter from him; because the minute I was free to come I was in no mind to wait. But, however it is, we'll have a grand little home of our own somewhere—just like we've always dreamed about. Will you be stopping in Tucson, sir? I would be proud for you to meet my brother."

"No, I'll have to be on my way back to my job, by this time to-morrow. With them doctor bills waitin' and a lot of other things to pay yet, I got to be hittin' the ball. I wouldn't live in the same town with Jake Zobetser, nohow. I wish I knew it was goin' to be all right for the boy."

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"There now, there now, don't you be a-worrying yourself sick about crossing bridges that are not even built yet. 'Tis natural there should be a thistle here and there amongst the clover, but bad as some folks may be and cold-hearted and all, there's good in them yet, just as there's good in everybody if only it can be got at."

"You expectin' your brother to meet you in Tucson, are you?"

"Indeed and I am. Larry will be at the station sure. I sent him a letter that I was coming."

"That's fine—you'll be mighty glad to see each other again, I reckon."

"Indeed, sir, I'm that happy I can hardly hold myself." She bent her head low over the baby in her arms so that the man might not see the tears of gladness which she could not control.

The never-tiring shuttle flung onward through the darkness of the night, carrying the human threads for its weaving. And so, at last under the brilliant Arizona stars, they labored up the heavy grade to the summit of Dragoon Pass, thundered down the other side, roared across the San Pedro Valley, climbed again to the higher levels between the Whetstones and the Rincons and, sliding easily down the long slopes into the mountain-rimmed valley of the Santa Cruz, stopped in Tucson.

Except for the Irish girl and the man with the baby, the tourist car passengers were long since in their berths. The porter, carrying the man's suitcase and Nora's bundle, led them down the dim,

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curtained aisle and out into the night. With a sincere, if awkward, expression of gratitude and a quick good-by which the girl scarcely heard, Crafts, with the baby in his arms, hurried away toward a man and a woman who were coming slowly to meet him.

Eagerly, anxiously, Nora O'Shea scanned the faces of the few people who at that late hour were at the station. Taking her bundle, she went a little way toward the waiting room, then paused to look questioningly about.

A group of passengers from the Pullman cars made their way to taxicabs and hotel buses. The conductor and train men exchanged greetings with the relieving crew and went away to their homes. Men in overalls inspected the wheels, iced the water tanks, and groomed the overland for the continuation of her run to the coast. Presently the new conductor signaled, the porters climbed aboard, and the train started. Train men swung on to the steps, vestibule doors were banged shut, the rear lights twinkled a moment and vanished around the curve beyond the Sixth Avenue crossing tower. The men with the express and baggage trucks pushed them into the buildings and shut and locked the heavy doors. The scene, save for an old Indian who sat on the ground with his back to the station wall, and the young woman in the queer dress with a funny-looking bundle, was deserted.

CHAPTER II

FATHERS AND SONS

EVERYWHERE in Arizona, the old and the new stand hand in hand—Past and Present are intimate. Side by side with all that is modern, one may see the mysterious ancient out of which the modern has come.

The builders of our concrete highways, through the greasewood and cacti of the desert, drive their giant tractors over the petrified trunks of forest monarchs that flourished here eons before the plans were drawn for the oldest pyramid in Egypt. Searchers for the materials demanded by manufacturers of our latest inventions find, embalmed by nature's processes and hidden in their mountain tombs, monstrous creatures that lived remote ages before the beginning of life as we know it. Where get-rich-quick development artists build their pasteboard and plaster bungalows one may find traces of a people who builded here so many ages ago that no scientist is daring enough to name the century of their activities. No one knows when the old pueblo, which in the time of our pioneers became Tucson, was first established. We do know, however, that when the only settlement on Manhattan Island was a small group of bark covered huts—when the site of Philadelphia was an unmapped wilderness and the

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prairies of Chicago were an unexplored region—Tucson was a walled city.

The Tucson of to-day, in the heart of this old, old land, is a city of fathers and sons. The fathers, with their ox teams, stage coaches, and Indian wars, laid here the foundation upon which they hoped their sons would build a civilization worthy of the race. And the sons are building.

With feverish activity they are putting down pavements, putting up electric lights, putting down gas and water pipes, putting up real estate signs, putting down more city wells, and extending the city limits to include new additions of the surrounding desert. With a fine contempt for the past they have destroyed the ancient wall, demolished many of the picturesque adobe structures of history, renamed the century-old streets, converted the beautiful old Saint Augustine church into an unsightly garage, and erected dance halls where, within the shadow of a heroic past, their sons and daughters may have all the modern advantages of a thorough education in jazz. On the very spot where men died to save their wives and children from the knives of painted savages, and women fought and endured beside their men, the grandchildren of those courageous souls hold petting parties and are bold only in their indecencies.

It is not strange, when you think of it, that the fathers should sometimes speak of the old days with a note of regret. It is not to be wondered at if they sometimes view the trend of their sons' improvements with dubious eyes.

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In this land of the old and the new this girl from far across the sea found herself unexpectedly alone. She could scarcely grasp the truth that her brother Larry had failed to meet her. Every hour of the long voyage—every hour of the long days on the train, she had looked forward to that moment of her arrival in Tucson and to her meeting with the boy to whom she was, as she said, “both sister and mother.” Save for Larry there was no one in the world to whom she could go. Her devoted heart, aching with the grief of her mother’s death and burdened with the sadness of those last days in her old home, wanted the comfort of his love. When the careless indifference of her fellow travelers had magnified her loneliness, she had found strength in the joy of her anticipated companionship with him. When the strangeness of the new, wild land had oppressed her with a sense of fear, she had found courage in the thought that she was going to Larry, and that with him she could not be afraid.

She would not leave the station. Certainly, she could have found a hotel; but what if Larry should come for her and find her gone? No, no, she had written Larry to meet her at the train. She must wait right there until he came. Every moment she watched for him. Every moment she expected him. She saw the stars in the east grow dim as the sky back of the dark hills was lit with the coming dawn. She watched the shadowy bulk of the mountains taking form. The gray of the sky changed to gold and crimson and blue. The sun leaped above the

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hill tops. Purple shadows filled the canyons. The world was flooded with light and color.

The morning brought a stir of life about the station. Nora asked and learned that there would be another train from the East during the forenoon. Perhaps Larry had thought that would be her train. She had her breakfast at a little restaurant across the street, and ate with her eyes on the station entrance, lest Larry should come and not find her there. A crowd of people assembled. There was the usual train-time activity. The train arrived and went on its way. The crowd dispersed. There would be still another train from the East in the afternoon. She must wait.

Many of the people, as she watched them come and go—Indians, Mexicans, Chinamen, Japanese—appeared strange, indeed, to this Irish girl who had never before been away from the place where she was born. The mountains that on every side lift blue peaks above canyon and foothill and desert—the feeling of vast space—the very quality of the atmosphere—impressed her with a sense of wonder and awe. The curious desert plants in the station grounds filled her with amazement. And, surely nothing could be more unlike her Irish home than this quaint, old-new city in a land which to her was all so strange. For Nora O'Shea, at least, Tucson was a place of mystery—a wonder-place of queer people who must, she imagined, do dark deeds and know strange delights. Beyond a doubt, danger lurked in these crooked streets, wild adventure waited. If only Larry would come!

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While the Irish girl was waiting for her brother Larry through the lonely hours of that day, Max Drayton, one of the Tucson fathers, was entertaining a visitor at the Old Pueblo Club. Solid and substantial both in physique and character, Max, in his western way, is a philosopher—which is to say, he believes in men as a whole the while he watches individuals with studious care. His judgments are invariably based upon a broad human charity—his observations are pointed with a rare humor. Drayton's guest was an author, making his first visit to Arizona. The two local papers agreed that he was famous, and implied, at least, that if the distinguished visitor were not already the dean of American letters he was in line for that honor.

The stranger looked about at the very modern and really excellent appointments of the Old Pueblo Club with a faintly concealed air of disappointment. "Really, you know, I am surprised."

There was an understanding twinkle in Drayton's shrewd eyes.

The writer continued: "This is all—well—it is not exactly what one expects to find in Arizona, you know."

"It's a pretty good little club."

"And your hotels, too."

"Hotels? What's the matter with our hotels?"

"Matter with them? Nothing, nothing at all, I assure you. It is only that I was not looking for exactly this sort of thing—you understand."

"Oh, I see. This is your first trip to Arizona, is it?"

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"Yes."

"What do you think of the movies?"

The author, not being familiar with Drayton's mental processes, waited a blank moment before answering: "The movies? Well, I can't say that I consider the motion picture to have reached a very high state of development from the standpoint of pure art, as yet, but they certainly are very instructive. From an educational standpoint their value is tremendous."

"I guess you're right."

Drayton's guest continued: "I confess I never miss one of those wild western things."

The man, who had lived so many wild western years, smiled, as one who finds his opinion justified.

Gazing across the table at his gray-haired host with an eagerness that was both flattering and sincere the author said: "I can't tell you, Mr. Drayton, how happy I am to have this opportunity of talking with you. For a long time I have wanted to write a novel of the West—one of those stirring, red-blooded stories of real life, you know."

"Is that so? And you've come to Tucson for your material, have you?"

"Frankly, I have. I find—" he waved his hand in a comprehensive gesture.

Max Drayton chuckled.

The writer smiled ruefully. "I confess: when I stepped off the train I expected to see cowboys standing around, wearing guns and big hats and high-heeled boots with spurs and those fringed legging things made of leather, you know. I've been

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here three days and haven't seen but two people on horseback—a man and woman—and they wore English riding breeches and rode English saddles."

Drayton laughed so at this that the university president, who was sitting at a neighboring table, smiled in sympathy.

"Seriously, Mr. Drayton," said the author—evidently anxious for the red blood he had come so far to find—"where would one go to see the real West?"

"Right here, of course," came the proud and ready answer. "We're just as far west as we ever were."

"But surely, Tucson wasn't always like this."

"Like this! Well, I should say *not*. But, for that matter, neither was New York always like it is to-day. It's still New York, though. If you don't believe it, you just ask some old timer there and see how quick he'll set you right."

Max Drayton's manner was, at times, a little gruff—verging even on the aggressive. The seeker for red blood murmured a "beg pardon" which Max did not even hear. "The fact of the matter is," he was saying, "Arizona is just as much the real West as it was in the days you're thinking about. You haven't caught up with us, that's all—you're too slow. I am not so sure," he added thoughtfully, "that Arizona has caught up with herself—yet."

It was the Eastern man's turn to smile.

"You people in the East," Drayton continued, "are still thinking of us here in the West as we used to be in the old days when every man wore a gun

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just as natural as he wore his pants. But you don't think of Ohio and Kentucky and Pennsylvania that way. And yet, when the pioneers first went into those states guns were just as common to them as they ever were to us out here. Talk about being wild and woolly! Why, I don't reckon there ever was a place that was wilder than Massachusetts was about the time the Pilgrim Fathers were packing their shooting irons to church and prayer meeting. The only real difference between the East and the West is that we, out here, are living a little closer to the pioneers. We haven't got so far from where we started as you folks have, that's all. But we're travelin', my friend—we're sure travelin'. The thing that's interesting a lot of us old timers who helped to make this country is this: While we're sheddin' our wild and woolly ways, and getting shut of our guns and all that, are we throwing away a lot of things with 'em that we ought to hang on to?"

"Just what do you mean, Mr. Drayton?"

"I mean, that in those days when we were pulling all that motion picture stuff that you call the real West, and that you're planning to make your story out of, we had a lot of ideas that would be mighty good for us to have right now."

"Yes?"

"Yes. You take even our gamblers—the old time professionals, I mean—they had mighty well set standards of honor and decency and fair play that they lived up to and sometimes died for. The old-time, wide-open, gambling days are gone—and we're all glad of it—but I'm telling you, sir, it wouldn't

do us a bit of harm if a lot of our young business men of these days had some of the old-style gambling standards of honor and decency and fair play, and had 'em strong enough to die for 'em—if it was necessary."

"Oh, I see."

"Sure! And you take the spirit of brotherliness and neighborliness now: Why in the old days we were just like one big family. By Ned! we had to be. Some black sheep, of course, like every family has; but if anybody was in trouble of any kind everybody was right there ready to help. Now, we're all so split up into clubs and circles and cliques and clans that you dassn't say "good morning" to your next door neighbor, unless you've got the right password. I tell you, sir, a man could starve to death right here in Tucson before these young organizers could untangle enough red tape to find out what was the matter with him."

The author—he was really an understanding writer—silently nodded assent. Drayton continued: "There's another thing; men used to be more certain—whether they were good or bad, friends or enemies, you knew where to find 'em; and you could gamble on finding 'em right there all the time. To-day, nobody knows where anybody stands on anything; and, mostly, by the time you find out where a man is, he ain't there at all. Do you see what I mean?"

"Indeed, I do." Then the author harked back on his trail for blood: "But, Mr. Drayton, is there not, here and there in Arizona, a good bit of the—the old color left?"

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"Sure—that's what I say; we're still so close to the pioneer days we haven't shed quite all of it yet. There's plenty right here in Tucson."

"Here?"

Max' eyes twinkled. "Sure, right here."

"Could I—would you—"

Max looked around. Through the wide arch of the club dining-room entrance they could see the lounging-room with the library and reading-room beyond. "Do you see that man over there by the window?"

"The portly old gentleman—reading?"

"That's the one—that's Colonel Brandonwell. Brand was a scout during the Civil War—up in Colorado and Wyoming. He came to Arizona along in the seventies and was Deputy United States Marshal in Tombstone. Brand has fought Indians and outlaws all over this Southwest."

The author, gazing at the gray-haired, well rounded, perfectly groomed, benevolent-looking gentleman in the easy chair, murmured a polite something and Max continued: "Take a look at the pair with their heads together over in the corner."

"You mean the small man and the professor-looking gentleman?"

Max laughed. "They're the ones—the smaller is Ned Hale—the professor gentleman, as you call him, is Charlie Baylong. They are both the sort you read about and see in the movies—went all through the Indian troubles when Geronimo was staging his red-blood stunts. They were in the cast, too, when the Apache Kid was putting on his famous motion-

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picture raids. Charlie, he's vice-president of one of our banks now, and a pillar in the Presbyterian church. And look—that's Fred Herrington just coming in. He is another of our wild and woolly ones."

"Surely not that distinguished-looking gentleman," protested the author. "Why, he looks like one of our prominent Philadelphia lawyers!"

"Is that so? Well, don't make any mistakes—Fred is a lawyer all right but he's one of the old timers too. Ask our club secretary, George Crider, that kindly, even spoken, gentleman you met when we came in—he's another who has lived through more red-blood stories than ever you'll write. And there's a lot more about town, too. But most of them have passed on—Bob Leatherwood—Cap Burgess—Bill Cody and—"

"Buffalo Bill?"

"Sure—he was a member of the Old Pueblo Club. They're going fast, though—these last two or three years." Drayton's voice dropped and for the moment he seemed to lose himself in the memories awakened by his guest's interest in the men of the West.

"But—but, Mr. Drayton—these men that you point out are all retired."

"Is that so? Huh! Maybe we're in the process of being retired, but there's quite a bunch of us sticking around yet—watchin' for what's likely to happen to the boys that have just climbed into their saddles. You see, all of us old timers know mighty well what Arizona *was*—but God Almighty only knows what Arizona is going to be when this generation gets through with it."

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The author was distinctly conscious of a thrill. He was disappointed in not finding the exact shade of crimson he sought, but still—still—there seemed to be something—"I suppose—" he began, and paused. Max was gazing intently at a young man who at that moment entered the club, and the writer noticed on his host's kindly face an expression of peculiar interest. Turning his head, he also looked at the man who was greeted by nearly every one in the room.

In years, he was somewhere between twenty-five and thirty, but with a decidedly boyish look on his smooth, deeply tanned face. Standing well over six feet, his back was straight, his shoulders broad, and he bore himself with that air of strength and confidence best described by the good and familiar "ready for either a fight or a frolic." It was not at all difficult to guess that he was a great favorite among his fellows.

The author looked again at his host's face and saw the fondness and pride which the philosopher was at no pains to hide. But back of the fondness—or, perhaps, because of it—there seemed to be a troubled question.

The old pioneer spoke slowly: "You say you want to see a real, live, honest-to-goodness cowman? Well, there he is."

"What! Where? You don't mean the big chap in the good-looking gray clothes—why, he looks more like a college athlete."

Drayton chuckled. "Well, as a matter of fact, he is—but don't fool yourself, he's a cowman too. I've

seen him ride broncs that had piled the best of them, and as for roping—even the Mexican vaqueros have had to hand it to him more than once.”

The author caught his breath. “Broncs”—“Ropes”—“Vaqueros”—the color—the precious color! For the moment he saw that university-looking young man through a—to put it mildly—pink haze. Then he spoke in an awed whisper: “Who is he?”

Drayton, whose mind seemed, now, somewhat preoccupied and disturbed, answered mechanically: “Jack Morgan—Big Boy Morgan, we all call him.”

“And do you mean it—is he a real cowboy, or are you spoofing me?”

Max returned to his guest and to his duty. “Real? I’ll say he’s real. He’s not exactly a cowboy, though. But as for that, there’s not a puncher in the Southwest that can show him anything. He is the owner of Las Rosas, one of the biggest ranches in Arizona.”

At this, the author was excited indeed. Who could say—there might still be a chance to save his novel of Arizona life from the wreck of things. With admirable self-control he managed to ask: “Is this ranch near Tucson?”

“About sixty miles south and west, on the other side of the Serritas, in the Arivaca country, down near the Mexican line.”

The author breathed a long sigh of relief. This certainly was more like it. “You can’t imagine how interesting this is, Mr. Drayton. Do you mind telling me more?”

"About Big Boy Morgan, do you mean?"

"Yes, if you don't mind."

Drayton looked thoughtfully toward Morgan who was the center of a little group of men. "There is not much to tell," he said slowly, then he added as an afterthought: "yet."

"He was born here in Arizona, was he?" prompted the author.

"Oh, sure—born right there at Las Rosas, and went to school and the university here in Tucson. He's never been out of the state, so far as I know, except a few trips to California, and one visit back East last year to Philadelphia."

As he spoke the concluding words of his summary, Drayton's voice was unconsciously lowered and his speech slowed down while his eyes turned once more toward the subject of his remarks.

The author murmured suggestively: "Philadelphia?"

Max Drayton looked straight into the eyes of his guest with a directness that was, to the other, a little disconcerting.

"My home is in Philadelphia, you know," the writer said apologetically.

"Is that so?" But still the man of Arizona held him with that steady gaze. "Do you know the Grays, there?"

The eyebrows of the writer went up. "The Charles Lighton Grays?"

"Yes."

"I know of them, certainly—one of our finest and most exclusive old families."

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"Morgan's father and old man Gray were great friends. There is a son, Charlie, about Morgan's age. Big Boy was visiting them."

Again the author's brain was in a whirl. This Arizona cowboy a guest of the Philadelphia Grays! He ventured another lead: "That must have been an interesting experience for your friend, Morgan."

Max Drayton drew a little back from the table, and the author felt as though the western man had gently but firmly closed a door, marked "private," in his face. "Big Boy's father, John Morgan, came out here the same year I did," said Max, in the manner of one relating a bit of authentic history. "We were both kids then, and we grew up together, along with two or three others who are still living here in Tucson. When John married—she was an Arizona girl, Molly Grayham, from over in the Fort Grant country—he located at Arivaca and started Las Rosas.

"Running a cow ranch in those days wasn't exactly play, as you can imagine. With the Apaches out you never knew when, raiders from south of the border, rustlers from everywhere, and all kinds of outlaws happening around between times, it took men like John Morgan to live through it. And it took women like Molly to keep up the woman's end, too. But they pulled it through somehow—she right there on the job with him every minute. Lord, I wonder what some of our jazzing, petting, painted, frizzled, and bare-legged girls, nowadays, would think of Molly. Why, one time when the Apaches had them corralled in the ranch house and was fixin'

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to wipe out the whole outfit, Molly sneaked out in the night, found a horse, and rode clean to Tucson for help. And, believe me, we made mighty good Indians out of what John and his cowboys had left of the bunch before we finished with 'em, that trip, too.

"Well, things got quieted down after a while and it wasn't so bad. And after their baby, Big Boy, was born, John and Molly settled down to developing Las Rosas in earnest. John didn't give all of himself to his own business either. There wasn't a big constructive problem in the territory that he didn't have a hand in working out. We'd 'a' made him governor when the territory was admitted to statehood if he'd 'a' let us.

"Take him all 'round, John Morgan was the whitest, squarest, biggest-hearted, bravest man I have ever known—and I've known a few good ones in my time, at that. Some said there was a streak of recklessness in his make-up that made him unsafe, and I guess maybe they were right about the reckless part. He'd take a chance quicker than any human being I ever saw, and you could see he loved it. But, by Ned! he just naturally had to be that way or he never could 'a' done what he did. For that matter, we were all of us taking chances all the time in those days—all Arizona was a chance. If this country was ever to amount to anything somebody had to be reckless. As for John Morgan being unsafe—that depends—he was the unsafest man in the world, for some people.

"When John died, Molly followed him about a

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month later. They left everything to Big Boy."

Once more the pioneer's gaze was turned thoughtfully toward the young master of Las Rosas.

The author, watching his host's face, asked the natural question: "Is the son like his father?"

Max Drayton's eyes were still fixed upon Big Boy Morgan as he answered slowly: "Yes, sir, he is—he's like his dad in everything—looks and all." He hesitated, then: "Even to that streak of recklessness. But—" he finished with sudden energy, "I'm here to tell you, sir, that these times are a lot different."

At this moment, Morgan, who had seen his father's old friend, broke away from the group of men with whom he had been laughing and talking, and, responding to Drayton's signal, came over to Max and the distinguished author. No greeting could have been more hearty than his: "Hello, Uncle Max!" while the words were accompanied by a smile as warm as his hand clasp was strong and sincere. His friends had already informed him as to Drayton's guest, and when he was introduced to the stranger, he was courteous but rather more reserved than was necessary.

"How is everything in town, Uncle Max?"

"Fine, son—far as I know. The organizers are now organizing an organization of the organizations, which I guess is a good thing—if it works. At any rate, it keeps everybody busy. Sit down and help me give this man some color for a wild-west novel." He signaled to a waiter.

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Big Boy dropped into a chair, smiled cordially at the author, and said to the man in the white jacket: "Just a sandwich and a cup of coffee, Taylor."

"You must be in a hurry," commented Drayton, regarding the young man with fatherly interest.

"I am."

"What's doing at Las Rosas these days?"

"We're mighty busy right now, Uncle Max—have been, in fact, for the past two months." Then he added lightly but as one who feels compelled to tell something of which he is reluctant to speak: "I'm tallying cattle."

For a long moment the gray-haired pioneer said nothing. The author felt something beneath the surface of his host's manner and, with uncommon good sense, did not break the silence. Then Drayton spoke gently: "What's the big idea in tallying your cattle, Jack?"

"Oh, just sort of curious to know where I really stand, that's all."

The author could not miss the opportunity: "May I ask what you mean by tallying cattle, Mr. Morgan?"

"Counting them," the ranchman answered briefly and turned back to Drayton. "I'm working short-handed at that."

The author tried again: "How many cows have you to count?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out," answered Morgan kindly. And again to Max: "On top of everything else—right when I needed him the most—

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one of my cowboys, Larry O'Shea, quit me cold—disappeared without a word. That's what brought me to town—to get a line on him if I can."

Drayton did not appear to be much interested in the whereabouts of Larry O'Shea. "Everything looking pretty good to you, Jack?"

"All right, I guess. There's about an average calf crop this year—the ranch is in fairly good condition. I guess Las Rosas can manage to get by. That's about all anybody is doing." There was a note of discouragement, discontent, indifference, or something in Big Boy Morgan's words that was clearly not in harmony with his personality.

The author ventured again: "Mr. Drayton has been telling me some very interesting things about Arizona pioneers. I suppose even *you* find life on the ranch quite different from what it was in your boyhood?"

"Yes," returned Morgan dryly with a quick glance at Drayton, "the range is fenced now." He rose as the other western man laughed. "Really, I must go—I want to scout around town for Larry O'Shea and get back to the ranch."

Drayton, looking up at him, asked: "How much longer is this tallying going to take?"

Morgan hesitated, and the author saw, or fancied that he saw, a shade of annoyance in the young man's face as though for some reason he resented the question. He answered shortly: "About a month," then: "Good-by, sir. *Adios*, Uncle Max."

Drayton and the author watched him as he walked away. Several men beckoned to him, but with a

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wave of his hand and a smiling negative shake of his head he passed on out of the big room.

"Your friend is rather quiet, isn't he?" said the writer.

Drayton's answer was almost an explosion: "Quiet!" Then he added as if in apology: "Well, yes, he is at times—when he has something on his mind. His father was that way, too."

"I'm afraid I don't just understand about this tallying cattle?" said the author inquiringly.

"I'm afraid I don't either," his host returned grimly.

"But don't they always know how many cattle they have on a ranch?"

"No, not exactly," Max explained patiently. "You see, the range takes in a good many miles—the country is pretty rough in the mountain sections, and the cattle are scattered. A cowman knows in a general way how many head ought to be carrying his brand, of course, but he only makes a careful count when there's some special reason for knowing as close as possible."

"Oh, I understand—and so you think young Morgan is—"

Max was looking at his watch. "I am sorry, sir, but I have an important engagement in about ten minutes. I have enjoyed our little visit. I'll introduce you to Ned Hale and Charlie Baylong—they can tell you all about the cattle business."

CHAPTER III

"WHERE IS LARRY O'SHEA?"

FROM the Old Pueblo Club, Max Drayton went straight to the Stockmen and Miners National Bank, of which he was a director. Three different men tried to stop him for a word, but with a short: "Sorry—have an appointment now—see you later," he hurried on.

Chester Solway, the president of the bank and Drayton's lifelong friend and business associate, greeted his old comrade with: "Hello Max—you seem to have something on your mind."

"I have."

When they were in the president's private office Drayton added abruptly: "Big Boy is tallying the Las Rosas cattle."

"What! The deuce he is! What do you guess it means?"

The other shook his head: "I can't get at it. I just saw him at the club. He sure seems to be worried about something. I thought maybe you would know."

Chester Solway's face, usually so cheerful, was grave. "It's all news to me, Max."

"He still banks with us, don't he?"

"Sure."

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“You haven’t had any hint of his being in financial trouble of any sort?”

“Not a thing—and we’d be pretty likely to catch a whisper of it—even if for any reason he didn’t come to us.”

“That’s what makes me wonder.”

“So far as his business with us goes, everything is fine and dandy, and I don’t think he does anything anywhere else—unless—” Solway hesitated.

“Look here, Chet,” said Drayton, “you and I stood mighty close to John Morgan, and we both knew Molly from the time she was a kid. It’s up to us to stand by their boy, whatever his trouble is. Let’s talk straight. We’re not a couple of pin-headed he-gossips.”

“I know, Max, I was just thinking—Big Boy has been staging some pretty wild parties in town the last few months.”

“Sure, we all know that. But just because a young horse pitches a little of a frosty morning when the saddle is cold, we don’t rate him as a rank outlaw.”

Solway smiled: “Just keep your shirt on, now, and let’s figure a little. I suppose you know where the youngster has been doing most of his gambling.”

“I can guess.”

“Yes, it’s at that hole in the wall run by ‘One Lung Willie’—as smooth a snake as ever sold a pill to a hop head.”

“Well?”

“Well, as you know, Jake Zobetser also favors us with his bank account.”

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"You're not saying that Zobetser is backing 'One Lung'?"

"No, but I *am* saying that all the signs point to the fact that Zobetser *owns* the hole in the wall, and that our slick friend, Willie, is merely hired by Jake to run the place for him."

"Well, by Ned! Is there anything that old devil, Zobetser, won't go into. I can't figure yet, Chet, why some of us didn't shoot the crooked son of a gun before he ever got himself fastened into the town and state like he has."

"There's another little thing you don't want to forget either, Max," continued Solway, "and that's the old trouble between Jake Zobetser and John Morgan."

"And so you think that maybe Big Boy has got himself tangled up with Zobetser?"

"I don't know, but I *do* know that Jake has never let up a minute on what he tried to do away back in John Morgan's day—add Las Rosas to his Black Canyon property. You remember how the two ranches join. And I can easily understand why, if the boy has been fool enough to fall into Zobetser's clutches, he might not like to come to us."

Drayton nodded thoughtfully. "We've got to stand by him, Chet, just the same—whether he wants us to or not."

"Of course we'll stand by him," echoed Solway heartily. "We couldn't do anything else for John and Molly's boy. But I don't see how we can help him unless he'll let us—always supposing he needs help."

“He’ll likely be in here sometime this afternoon,” said Max. “Suppose you watch out for him and have a little friendly talk. You know—not asking too many questions, but just to let him see that we’re here if he needs us.”

“I sure will, Max. By the way, did you know that young Gray is visiting at Las Rosas?”

“Charlie Gray, from Philadelphia—is he here?”

“Came about two weeks ago. I have a long letter from his father. The boy, it seems, is a little under the weather, sort of run down, I gathered, and needs a rest. They’re mighty fine people, Max. Gray mentioned you in his letter—sent his regards and said how much he used to enjoy his vacations with John, and recalled that famous lion hunt we four had together up in the Bear Valley, you remember?”

“Do I remember! Why didn’t the old man come out himself?”

Solway laughed. “Said he didn’t believe you and I could hunt like we used to.”

“Huh! It’s funny Big Boy didn’t mention Charlie being here. Do you know, Chet, I can’t get over the notion that Jack has never been the same since that trip to Philadelphia last year?”

“Oh, I don’t know, maybe you’re seeing things. How is he different?”

“Well, he is. And so Charlie Gray is visiting him—that’s fine. But he has had another guest at the ranch for some time, now, hasn’t he?”

“Yes—man by the name of Holdbrook. He’s from somewhere in the East, too. He has been with Big Boy several months now. I don’t know any-

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thing about him but it's a cinch, from his looks, that he is not in Gray's class—or in Morgan's either for that matter."

"I never even saw him," said Drayton.

"I have, once or—By Jove, Max! he and Jake Zobetser were together here in the bank one day—as friendly as you and I. I remember wondering about it at the time."

"Well," said Drayton after a moment's thought, "as you say, I don't see that there's anything we can do if Big Boy won't let us, and it may all be nothing but smoke anyway. But you see him, just the same."

"You don't suppose—" the bank president hesitated and looked a little embarrassed.

"What?"

"I was going to say—perhaps some woman has got him on the run. Sometimes, you know, that can play the very deuce with a young fellow like Jack."

"He never showed any unhealthy interest in the girls that I ever remember."

"I know, but—well—he might have met some one in Philadelphia, see?"

Drayton shook his head. "I don't believe it, Chet. If that was it, Big Boy would have brought her home with him, or else he'd be camping right there, yet."

For two hours, Big Boy Morgan went about town, seeking some trace of his missing cowboy—Larry O'Shea. At Ronstadts, at Kitts, at the Tucson

"WHERE IS LARRY O'SHEA?"

Hardware Company, and several other stores he inquired with no success. At the Modern Barber shop, the hotels, even down on Meyer Street, it was the same. Then, as Drayton had said he would likely do, the young ranchman dropped in at the bank. Chester Solway hailed him cheerily and Big Boy went to shake hands with the man who, for so many years, had been his father's confidential friend and adviser.

They spoke generally of business conditions and ranching—of Charlie Gray and his visit to Las Rosas; but both men knew that they were only marking time. At last Solway, trying to speak casually, said: "Max Drayton tells me you are tallying cattle, Jack—how about it?"

The banker could see that it was this for which the young man had been waiting. And yet, curiously enough, Morgan seemed to resent the question and answered as he had answered Drayton—with an explanation which meant nothing at all. It was clear that he wanted to confide in his friend but for some reason hesitated and dodged the straightforward course.

Solway, on his part, was a little hurt but for the young man's sake invited his confidence as he would not ordinarily have done. "Everything all right with you, is it, Jack? I don't need to tell you, after the years your father and I were together, how glad I would be to do anything I possibly can for you."

"I know that, Mr. Solway," returned Big Boy with feeling, "and I appreciate it—but really there is nothing."

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"Glad to know it," returned the banker heartily and with that, apparently, dismissed the matter. Then, as one who has a moment to spend in mere friendly talk he continued: "Everything quiet along the border now?"

"So far as I know. There are rumors of smuggling and gun-running—as there always are—but I never pay any attention."

"Many soldiers stationed at Arivaca?"

"About what they always have. They're patrolling the line. I never see much of them though. Jim Holdbrook spends a good deal of his time at the post."

"Holdbrook is still with you, is he?"

"Yes."

"He's making quite a stay."

"Quite a stay," assented Morgan grimly.

"The Black Canyon outfit been making any trouble for you lately?"

At this question the young ranch man betrayed a quickened interest. "No," he answered slowly, "I can't say for sure that they have—more than usual. I'm satisfied that they're picking up Las Rosas cattle here and there, just as they have been for years. That Indian Pete and the bunch he has would do anything but honest work. But I haven't been able to fix anything on them. It's pretty hard to prove a thing sometimes, you know. Located as they are, they have all the advantage."

Solway nodded. "I know. Your father fought them for years." Then with a look toward the front door, he added: "Speaking of Black Canyon—there's your friend Zobetser now."

"WHERE IS LARRY O'SHEA?"

A man of about Solway's age was just entering the bank. Looking neither to the right nor left, he went to one of the desks and proceeded to write a check. With his huge, rounded shoulders, fat neck, and enormous head bent over the desk, and his thin legs that appeared inadequate to carry the bulk of his body, he looked not unlike some uncouth monster of a fairy tale.

Solway saw Big Boy Morgan's face set in a way that reminded the banker of the young man's father. And then as Zobetser started toward a teller's window, Morgan, without a word, left Solway and went toward the door where he turned and stood with his back to the entrance, watching Zobetser and evidently waiting for the man to finish his business.

Zobetser crowded rudely in ahead of the waiting line, elbowed a young woman aside from the window, and threw his check down before the teller. The young man on the other side of the grating hesitated—he wanted to rebuke the discourtesy of this customer.

"Well, what's the matter with you?" snarled Jake. "That's good, I guess, ain't it? Do I have to stand here all day waiting for my money, heh?"

The teller silently counted out the bills and, as Jake turned away, apologized to the young woman.

With his head down, Zobetser was shuffling toward the door when he found his way barred by some one who did not promptly step aside from his path—a courtesy which this creature of power commonly exacted as his right. With a growl he looked up.

The disturbance at the teller's window, slight as

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it was, had been enough to fix the attention of everyone in the bank upon Zobetser. That Big Boy Morgan had deliberately put himself in the man's way was clear, and there was that in the young ranchman's manner which caused Solway and several others who knew both men to watch for the next move with breathless interest.

For a moment they stood face to face; then Zobetser stepped aside to pass on; but again he found Big Boy blocking his way. He could not now overlook the fact that Morgan's action was intentional. A fawning smirk twisted his heavy features into the semblance of a smile, and his little pig-like eyes glittered with hate and apprehension as he said in his thick, heavy voice: "Oh, excuse me. I ask your pardon, please. I did not at the first see who it was. Well—well—so it is Big Boy himself. How do you do?" He put out a hand which Morgan pointedly ignored.

Again Jake moved aside to pass, and again Big Boy stepped in his way.

"Well—well—and so you have, I think, come to town for a little fun—heh, yes? Oh, you boys—you boys! Well, I too once was a boy, myself." He shook his heavy head sadly and shrugged his rounded, massive shoulders. "But I tell you there was no funny times for boys like me—no—no. It is much easier for boys what have fathers to leave them big ranches and cattle and money. And how are you doing with your ranch, Las Rosas, heh? The range, it is good, yes? And the calves, they are plenty, heh?" And then, in spite of his evident fear, the man

"WHERE IS LARRY O'SHEA?"

could not wholly suppress a note of sneering derision: "You should be doing very well, my young friend—Big Boy—very—very—well. You have some good cowboys at Las Rosas, heh?"

Morgan, who from the first had been silently watching his father's old enemy as one might watch a particularly loathsome reptile, spoke: "Where is Larry O'Shea?"

Zobetser threw out his hands in a gesture of amazement. "What? You have lose your Irishman that you bring all the way from the East? Well—well—that is now too bad—what a pity. But how should I know where he is gone—heh?" He laughed. "Your Irishman, too, it may be, have gone for a little fun somewhere—like the boss—heh?"

He again started toward the door, and this time Big Boy permitted him to pass.

Chester Solway drew a long breath of relief. The few who understood the significance of the little scene looked at one another with knowing smiles. Big Boy Morgan stood for a moment gazing thoughtfully after Zobetser then, without a word to any one, walked down the long room to the side entrance and left the building.

CHAPTER IV

JAKE ZOBETSER

THIS man, Zobetser, first appeared in Arizona during those years when John Morgan, Max Drayton, Chester Solway, and their pioneer comrades were endeavoring to bring something like civilization to the territory. No one ever knew his history or from whence he came, which was not at all an uncommon ignorance in those unsettled and somewhat lawless times. But Zobetser was not long in finding his own place in the community, or—perhaps it would be better said—the community was not long in placing him. With undeniable genius of the most unprincipled sort, he had steadily grown in wealth and power. With but few exceptions he was disliked and hated by his fellow citizens, though many who had reason to fear him made pretense of admiration and friendship. By those who found themselves in his ruthless clutches he was obeyed. One saving virtue touched the chords of pity in the hearts of those who knew him best—his love and devotion to his wife. Their only child, he tolerated, but never failed to show his disappointment that she was not a boy. A year after his wife's death he acquired a woman companion—ostensibly his secretary—whose history was as obscure as his own. When

his daughter, unable to bear the humiliation of her position in the community, married against his wishes, Zobetser gave himself wholly to the bitter passion of his life—Power—a power that would enable him to compel the service and homage of the community that in its heart despised him.

Leaving the bank, Zobetser made his way, with characteristic ruthless disregard for other pedestrians on the streets, to his home in the older part of the city. The building was one of those ancient adobe structures with heavy walls, flat roof, and barred windows. The front door opened on the sidewalk of the street. In the rear was the usual patio. One of the rooms, with windows on the street, served as an office. The remaining apartments were living quarters for himself and two old Indian servants—a man and a woman.

Cora, the secretary, did not raise her eyes from her desk as he entered the office. In her youth, this woman must have been beautiful, but the years had written in her face a tale of mingled sorrow and recklessness that had developed into a tragedy of hopeless surrender to evils which her woman's soul abhorred.

"Well," demanded Zobetser loudly, "how is the baby—heh? You get a good nurse for him like I told you? Is he all right—the little one?"

The woman looked at the man as if she were seeing something in him that she had never recognized before. "Yes," she said, "I found a nurse. The baby is asleep. Don't make so much noise or you will waken him."

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Zobetser lowered his voice but spoke with vigor: "And that fellow Crafts—where is he?"

"He is sleeping too."

"What—what do you say—asleep—him—at this time of the day! That will show you what he is good for. Look at me—do I sleep in the daytime, heh? No—no, I do not sleep—I work—work—work, and so I must pay even for the funeral of my girl because she would have this fellow who can do nothing but sleep!"

"Hush, I tell you," said Cora, "or you will waken them with your fool raving."

Zobetser closed the door leading to the other part of the house then coming back faced his companion. "Do you know who I met in the bank just now—where I went after the funeral to draw some money to give to that sleeper in there—heh? No? Well, it was that Big Boy Morgan. And what do you think he wanted to know—heh?" Zobetser laughed. "'Where is Larry O'Shea?' he asked that of me—'where is Larry O'Shea?'" Again he laughed.

The woman watched for the effect of her words as she said coldly: "Sounds to me like Morgan was getting wise to things. If he ever sets himself to get you—good night!"

At this, the man let himself go, and as the words—often in broken and incomplete sentences—came tumbling from his lips, he moved about the room, with the angry restlessness of a caged wild beast, while his face was a snarling, scowling mask of passion. The woman watched and listened with a

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curious expression of mingled hatred, contempt, fascination and fear.

"He puts himself in my way—right before everybody he stands and looks at me—like I was a dirty worm under his feet what he don't like even to step on with his boots. It is just like what his father was before him! When I offered to John Morgan a pardnership with me if he would join the two ranches into one, and he would help me to put over a little deal I had with the government what did he do—what did he do—I ask you that—heh?"

The woman prodded him maliciously with: "He did what young Morgan will do some day, I expect—kicked you out of the house."

Zobetser shook his huge, fat fists in impotent rage. "That is what he did. Me—me—who was offering him a fortune—'Please Mr. Morgan won't you accept this half million as a little favor to me'—and he lifted up his foot and kicked me. 'Get out,' he says—like I was a dog—just like I was a dog. And then he told everybody that I was a crook, and made it so that the men I had fixed already did not dare to put through the deal, and I never did get the land. And now here is this son the same—like the old man. But he shall see, I am not a worm in the dirt that he can step on under his feet."

"Oh, no," jeered the woman. "You're no worm. I suppose you stood up to Big Boy Morgan like a lion and told him where to head in—I can see you doing it."

For a moment the enraged man glared at her as if

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he would tear her to pieces. But she only taunted him with a contemptuous smile.

"Some day," he muttered, "you will make me forget."

"Oh, no, you won't, Jake Zobetser—you can't forget. Neither can I."

The effect of her words was instantaneous. With a shrug of his huge shoulders he said in a wheedling tone: "That is right, my dear. Jake Zobetser will not forget. You shall see what I will do for you, my Cora. When I have this Las Rosas ranch with my Black Canyon property all in one big grand empire, then will the people look up to us. And this fool Morgan, who thinks he could kick me, where will he be—heh? I ask you, where will he be? Now, everybody talks only of the Morgan ranch. They say nothing at all of Zobetser's Black Canyon. When there is no more a Las Rosas but it is all Black Canyon, then they will no more talk of the great Morgan but will say only Zobetser."

"Bah!" she retorted, "people will always hate you for what you are, just as John Morgan did; and people will always love Big Boy Morgan for what he is, no matter if you robbed him of everything he has in the world. Forget it, Jakie. Besides, as I have always told you, you will go on the rocks yourself if you keep on the way you are heading."

"Heh! But it is you who are afraid. I am doing no more than everybody is doing. If somebody gets caught they call it grafting, stealing, or something else. When they do not get caught then it is just good business. The governments, the big cor-

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porations, and bankers—they are all great because they do as I do—because they get power to make men do what they say. No matter how they get power, they get it—that is why they are great. I, Zobetser, will get power—always more and more power—so I will be great, too. I am as good as the rest. They would take me now into the best of their society if I should say to them the word. They would not dare tell me ‘no.’ But I do not say the word—not yet. Heh? Do I not know these respectable ones? Do I not know the things they do when they think it is safe—heh? It is as I tell you—no matter what you do if you are successful in gaining the power. What do they know of me—nothing. What would they dare do if they did know—nothing.”

“But you know,” said the woman slowly, “and I know. It is what we know about ourselves that—”

She was interrupted by a cry from the baby.

Zobetser darted across the room and flung open the door. A moment later he had taken the crying child from its bed and was soothing it with the most extravagant terms of endearment. Between low murmured expressions of affection he cried out harsh instructions and commands to the nurse, Cora, and the old Indian woman. “Do something, fools, dummies. Is it that you want him to die? Why do you not know something to do? You do not care, that is it—heh?”

When the baby ceased his cries the man continued to fondle him with all manner of glittering promises. “Big Boy Morgan! Who is he—heh? But

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this is my Big Boy Zobetser that shall be rich and great when John Morgan's big boy is in the dirt of the gutter. Look, Cora, look, how he is the image of his grandfather! His poor mother was never a true daughter, but no one can say that her son is not a Zobetser." He tried to sing a lullaby and laughed uproariously when the baby struck his fat jowl with a tiny fist.

Then in the midst of his play with the baby he called harshly to the woman: "You phone George Simpkins and tell him I want him to come here right away quick. There, of course, he shall have grandpa's watch if he wants it. See, the little dear, how smart he is already."

The secretary stood hesitating in the doorway.

"Why don't you do what I tell you, Cora? Bless his sweet little heart. Laugh for grandpa—laugh."

The woman protested: "That Simpkins man isn't safe, Jake, I wish you would find some one else."

"Always you are squawking about him," cried Zobetser. "I tell you again he is safe because he is afraid to be anything else. There is no loyalty like fear, my dear—as you should not need to be told. Did grandpa's precious little man want to pull his grandpa's nose—of course, he can—he can pull anybody's nose he wants to."

Zobetser was still playing with his grandson when Cora came to tell him that the man he had summoned was in the office. Bidding the woman stay and amuse the baby, Jake went into his place of business.

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George Simpkins was a merchant. He stood before Zobetser with the manner of one who wishes with all his heart he could be anywhere else but who, for certain reasons, endeavors to conceal his desire under a manner of friendliness.

"Sit down," said Zobetser gruffly.

Simpkins seated himself, nervously fingering his hat.

Zobetser's small, deep-set eyes studied the man's face as he said: "I have the word that to-night the soldiers will be between Sasabe and Pozo Verde. I have sent a messenger to say the stuff will be moved. You will make everything ready, heh?"

The merchant's face paled. "Look here, Jake," he said, "I wish you would let me out of this."

The answer was a growl: "Why?"

"Why! My God, man, think of what it would mean to me if—if anything went wrong—my wife, my children, my standing in the town."

"Better you should think what will happen to you if you do not do what I want, heh?"

The man buried his face in his hands. Zobetser continued, never taking his eyes from his victim: "You are one of the respectables—heh? And I, Zobetser—everybody knows what I am, yes? But everybody does not know about some of the goods that are shipped to your respectable store." He laughed. "And everybody does not know about certain little card parties, and certain little pieces of paper you give to my man, Willie—heh? Everybody does not know what Zobetser could do to the respectable and prosperous merchant—nobody but

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you and me know that. Well, I will tell you something: you shall help me a little more, then I will also become respectable and we will forget—heh?”

The merchant started to his feet. “Do you mean that, Jake—do you?”

“Sure, why not? Now listen—I tell you once again—do what I say for you to do and you are all safe. If you do not—then you will see what I will do.”

“All right—all right,” returned the other, wiping the beads of perspiration from his forehead. “It will be to-night, then?”

“Yes, and there is something else—Big Boy Morgan is in town.”

“Yes, I know it.”

“Well?”

“Well?”

“Big Boy Morgan must stay in town to-night.”

“But what if I can’t keep him?”

“You will keep him, my friend. He is in the mood for one of those nice little card parties that you and some others have with him. You must arrange it.”

“What difference does it make whether Big Boy is in town or at home?”

“There are two reasons. One is that the machines must go to-night by the Nogales road and the Soporì—that is the way he would be going home. The other reason is my business. It is your business to fix up the little party at Willie’s place and to see that our Big Boy friend forgets his troubles—heh?”

As Simpkins left the office, Cora entered from the

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other room. Closing the door behind her, she stood with her back against it, looking at Zobetser.

The man saw instantly that his secretary was disturbed. "What is the matter?" he cried. "Is it something has happened to my baby, heh? Why don't you say it? Is the little one not well?" He heaved himself out of his chair while he was speaking and started for the door.

But the woman checked him: "Don't be so fast. The kid is all right. Sit down."

"Well," he growled, sinking back into his seat, "what is it then, that you look so scared?"

"Crafts is awake. He came in just as you left."

"Well, what? It is time that sleeper was waked up."

"Somebody else had better be waking up, too, I'm thinking," returned the woman. "Listen, Jake: Larry O'Shea's sister is right here in Tucson, and she'll be looking for him."

Zobetser glared at her—his pig eyes shining under his scowling brows like two points of light. "And where has Larry O'Shea's sister come from, heh?"

"From Ireland—straight here from Ireland. And she's come to live with her brother. She was expecting him to meet her at the depot."

"Well, and am I to help it if her brother was not there to meet her, heh?" he laughed.

"But she'll be trying to find him—can't you see it?"

"Well, nobody needs to try very hard to find Larry O'Shea, is it? This sister of his from Ireland—she can find him if she wants, heh?"

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"Yes, oh yes, but when she *does* find him she is going to find out a lot of other things, too. And from what I got out of Crafts' story, Larry O'Shea's sister is not the kind of a young woman that would do us a bit of good. It seems she's had to mother this boy from the time he was a baby—practically raised him. She's no lip-stick, cigarette-sucking, necking, fool of a girl. Nora O'Shea is a real woman with ideas of life and decency that don't fit in a little bit with yours. And the quicker you get hold of that, Jakie, the safer you'll be. You should hear Crafts tell about what she did for him and the baby on the train."

"The baby—she did something for my baby, did she?"

"Did she? I'll say she did!"

Zobetser looked at his watch. "The train for Crafts to go back to where he belongs will come in an hour and a half. He is not guessing anything about Larry O'Shea, heh?"

"Not a whisper. He thinks the boy is with Morgan, and that he met his sister at the depot all right and regular."

Zobetser laughed. "That is good. Now I will have some talk with this fellow, about the baby, heh? He shall tell me this story of the wonderful young woman from Ireland who is looking for her brother, heh?"

"Oh, you can laugh!" retorted the woman. "But you'll change your mind by the time you have heard Crafts, or else you're a bigger fool even than I think you are. When this Nora O'Shea finds her brother

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Larry, your troubles will darned soon come to a head."

"Well, then—and if she should never find him, heh? If she should go away off somewhere—suppose away down into Mexico, where she could not even talk the language—then who would have troubles, heh?"

The woman shrugged her shoulders. "We've sure got to do something—and do it darned quick."

"It will be easy enough," returned Zobetser, "we will go now to the baby and to this fellow, Crafts, who is so much of the time asleep. Then I will see what we will do with this woman who comes so far from her home in Ireland to find her brother. It will be easy."

It was late in the afternoon when, in the throng of people who had gathered to meet an east-bound train, Nora O'Shea caught sight of a face that she knew. With a little cry, she ran to him. "Mr. Crafts—Mr. Crafts—please, sir, is it you? All this day long I've been here, waitin' for Larry boy—and—and—he—" she burst into tears.

Consternation was on the miner's honest face as he looked from Nora to Zobetser's secretary, who was with him, and back to the Irish girl. "Well, what do you know about that?" he muttered when his slow mind had grasped the situation. "Ain't that too bad, now?"

Through her tears Nora forced a pitiful little laugh. "'Tis a good joke on me, a thinking all the way that I was to find him here waiting for me. And 'tis a

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good one on Larry boy, too, with him a thinking me safe home in Ireland when all the time here I am, right here with him in Arizona."

Zobetser's secretary spoke with a kindly smile for the girl: "Is this the young lady you told us about, Mr. Crafts—the one who was so good to the baby?"

"Sure," returned Crafts, "this is her. She was expectin' her brother to meet her, like I said, and somehow or other he ain't showed up." To Nora, he added awkwardly: "This here lady works for Jake Zobetser, miss—my baby's granddad, you know. She just happened to come down to the depot to see me off on this train that I'm takin' back home."

Nora acknowledged the introduction with a little bow and a smile.

The woman put her arm around the Irish girl's shoulder. "You dear child, Mr. Zobetser is so grateful for all that you did for the baby. He told me he would certainly see you at the earliest possible moment to thank you for your kindness. I'm sure it is only a mistake of some sort that has prevented your brother from being here to meet you, and you mustn't worry about it another minute. I shall take you straight to Mr. Zobetser. He will be delighted to do anything in the world for you. Mr. Zobetser is so devoted to his grandson."

Nora O'Shea looked at Crafts doubtfully.

"I'd say that was the thing for you to do, miss," he said hopefully. "Zobetser was sure pleased over what I told him about you and baby, and you can't

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do no good stayin' here. Looks like you'd have to go somewhere."

Nora turned to the woman: "'Tis not that I'm wantin' in gratitude to you and Mr. Zobetser, ma'am, but—but I'm that worried and anxious to see Larry."

"Never you mind, dearie—you shall see your brother presently. You just come home with me now and everything will be all right."

"Do you know Larry—maybe?"

"I've seen him—and a fine boy he is, too. Why, dearie, his not meeting you like you expected is just some silly little mistake—that's all. There can't anything have happened to your brother or we would have heard about it—don't you see?"

Crafts, carrying the Irish girl's bundle, went with them to a taxicab. "At any rate, miss," he said wistfully, as the driver started the engine, "you'll get to see the baby again."

CHAPTER V

THE GUESTS OF LAS ROSAS

IF the famous author, who was Max Drayton's guest that day at the Old Pueblo Club, had called at Big Boy Morgan's ranch on the afternoon of the following day, he would have suffered still another shock. No scene could have been more peaceful. In the mile or more of low, gently rolling hills that lie between the main road and the ranch buildings there was no sign of life save the birds in the mesquite trees of the sandy washes and the small creatures that live in the grama grass, the native pasture grass of this section of the Southwest. At the edge of the pond that lies just under the hill north of the house a few gentle Hereford cattle stood knee-deep in the quiet water or lay contentedly in the shade. Near the big gate a mild-eyed milk cow was dreamily chewing her cud. Save for three old horses that stood under the shed with low-hanging heads and closed eyes, fast asleep, the corrals were empty. About the barn chickens clucked in lazy contentment or scratched occasionally as if more from an indolent desire to kill time than from any need, and in the wide yard between the gate and the house a turkey hen followed by her brood moved with slow matronly dignity.

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As one approaches from the north, the long, low bunk house is on the left of the ranch house proper, with the space between shaded by pepper and umbrella trees. The buildings are adobe, plastered and whitewashed. On two sides of the ranch house there are deep verandas—one facing the barn, the corrals and the main entrance, and the other overlooking an old rose garden on the westward slope of the hill and the little valley beyond. To the north, the gentle grassy hills roll, ridge on ridge, to the rugged heights of the distant Serritas. To the east, the rippling sea of grass breaks some fifteen miles away against the rocky flanks of the Tumacacori range. To the south, the country is a jumble of sharp peaks, precipitous cliffs and irregular ridges. On the west, a well-watered valley of lush green meadows and groves of giant sycamore trees lies in the foreground with grass-covered hills rising to oak and cedar-clad mountains beyond and Yellow Jacket Peak standing boldly against the sky. The group of eight or ten adobe houses, one general store and post office, and the quarters of the army post which makes the town of Arivaca, is some three miles to the northwest but is hidden from the ranch house by the hills. From skyline to skyline it is a scene to make one gasp with delight at the sheer beauty of the landscape. From a ranchman's point of view, El Rancho de Las Rosas is an empire of natural riches.

But the birthplace of Big Boy Morgan, set amid these surroundings of beauty and wealth, was pathetic in its appearance of having outlived the day of its glory. The place, while clearly inhab-

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itable, was run down and neglected as though no one had the heart to give to it those touches of loving care which alone can keep the charm and beauty of a home. The rose garden, from which the ranch had its name, was overgrown with weeds. The bushes were untrimmed and parched. The vines that shaded the verandas were unkempt. There were pickets missing from the fence which separated the house and garden from the big yard in front. Everywhere there were the untidy marks of careless disregard.

But Las Rosas was not as deserted, that afternoon, as it would have at first appeared. In the cool shade of an umbrella tree between the end of the north veranda and the bunk house a gentleman lounged in an easy chair. He was a man about young Morgan's age but in general presented a marked contrast to the stalwart, bronzed-faced ranchman. His slender body was clothed as one with proper regard for the conventions would dress at any of the better known summer places on the Eastern coast. His clean-shaven face, pale and thin with a broad, high forehead, was the face of a scholar. Unmindful of his surroundings he was absorbed in the pages of a heavy-looking book.

The screen door of the kitchen opened. An old-time Chinaman, carrying a glass of something on a tray, came out. The door swung shut with a bang. The student did not lift his eyes from his book. With a queer, shuffling gait the old Chinaman approached the gentleman in the easy chair. With his tray and glass he stood before the student

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patiently waiting. Presently the man glanced up but instantly went on with his reading as if he were too absorbed in his book to be more than vaguely conscious of the Chinaman's presence.

The old servant's yellow features wrinkled in a smile as he said cheerfully: "Tlime fo egg-nog, Miste Chollie."

Charlie Gray, as if glad for this opportunity to voice his scorn of the author whose thought he was considering, read aloud: "'Happiness is a mental state resulting from an attitude of mind toward the peculiar condition of life under which the individual is placed.'" He paused to gaze witheringly at the Chinaman as if he could find no words with which to express his contempt.

The old servant bobbed his head and with a cheerful grin offered his tray. "Tlake um egg-nog now, Miste Chollie."

The student turned a page: "'A determined purpose to be happy must result in a cheerful and wholesome attitude of mind toward one's condition of life.'" With the air of one who demands "now what do you think of such rot as that" he again looked up at the Chinaman.

The old man nodded vigorously. "Me sabe, alle lighte, Miste Chollie, you catch um too much blook, make um sick—catch um egg-nog now, make um well," he offered his tray persuasively.

With bitter derision the other returned: "The judge says 'you are to be hanged by the neck until you are dead,' you must shout with gladness, 'ha ha, how delightful.'" "

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“Alle lighte, alle lighte.”

“The general says ‘you are to be shot at sunrise,’ you must answer, ‘bully for you, general! I thank you, sir, for this great happiness.’”

Puzzled but cheerful—glad to do anything if the young man would only take the egg-nog—the old Chinaman answered: “Alle lighte. Catch um happiness bly an bly, Miste Chollie.”

Charlie Gray rose to his feet and moved restlessly to and fro as he continued with indescribable bitterness: “The doctor tells me that I must give up everything and waste months of precious time here in Arizona—Arizona!” He gazed about him with a look of despair. “Blazing sun, empty skies, burning desert, barren mountains, lizards, rattlesnakes, bawling cattle, smelly corrals, crazy horses. My God! the emptiness of it all—the loneliness of the long days and longer nights!” Overcome with self pity he bowed his head.

The old servant, whose wrinkled yellow countenance was a picture of patient sympathy, was silently offering the consolation of his egg-nog when Gray with sudden energy angrily shook his book in the Chinaman’s face: “And this unspeakable ass tells me to shout with joy and be happy—happy!” He threw the book from him with all the violence he could muster.

The Chinaman, not in the least alarmed at this burst of temper, looked calmly after the book, then with renewed hope and expectant air offered his tray. “Alle lighte, make um shout, Miste Chollie, holla like hell but tlake um egg-nog now—make um well bly an bly.”

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At this somewhat startling piece of advice Charlie Gray looked at the servant as if for the first time he actually saw him. Gravely he regarded the tray and glass as if to grasp the situation in its fullness. Then, the whimsical, lovable soul of the man broke through the mental shell of the student and he laughed away the bitterness and anger, while the old Chinaman grinned and nodded his delight at having so far achieved his purpose.

Taking the proffered glass and holding it in the manner of one about to offer a toast, the while he smiled affectionately upon the old Chinaman, Gray said: "Wing Foo, you are a dear, faithful old heathen and I am nothing but an intellectual ruin with too much university and a blank where my heart ought to be." He lifted his glass high: "Here's to you! The only satisfied and happy man on El Rancho de Las Rosas—the unhappiest corner of the unhappiest land in the unhappy universe, and may God have mercy on your soul!" He drained the glass while the Chinaman, watching, smiled his approval.

"That mo bette, Miste Chollie, egg-nog make um well—fat—stlong—alle samee Boss Big Bloy."

"Ugh!" shrugged Gray with a grimace as he replaced the glass on the tray. "Boiled eggs for breakfast—omelet for dinner—fried eggs for supper—poached eggs for lunch—raw eggs for appetizers with egg-nog in between! Do you know, Wing, I dreamed last night that I was an incubator and woke myself up trying to cackle and crow at the same time."

"Alle lighte, Miste Chollie, mebbly so lay um egg

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bly an' bly!" He placed his tray deftly on a rustic table which stood near and turned again to face the younger man who had resumed his seat in the easy chair. There was no smile on the wrinkled old face now as he said in a tone of sad inquiry: "Nobody catch um happness, Las Losas, Miste Chollie?"

"Not a soul, Wing."

Wing shook his head mournfully. "Boss Big Bloy, him no come back ffrom Tucson let."

"Something must have detained him, Wing," said Gray soothingly.

But Wing Foo was not to be consoled. "No good fo' Boss Big Bloy stay in Tucson, Miste Chollie!"

"He'll be along presently. I wouldn't worry," returned Gray, touched by the old Chinaman's trouble.

"Mebby so—no can tell. When Boss Big Bloy, him little blaby, likee so," he measured with his hands, "him catch um happness plenty—laugh, laugh alle ttime—clow likee chicken. When him little big bloy, so," he indicated the height of a child, "him happy alle ttime—play with ol Wing Foo alle day. Steal um pie ffrom Chinaman klitchen, you sabe, Miste Chollie, you steal um pie, too."

"By George, don't I remember though!"

Wing Foo continued: "Bly an bly little Boss him glow up," he held his hand high above his head to indicate a tall man, "catch um school. Bly an bly no more school. Wolk on lanch, lide, hunt, sing, laugh, alle ttime catch um happness." Suddenly his voice sank to a mournful key: "Then ol Boss Molgan, him die. Ol Misse, she die too. Bly an bly

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Boss Big Bloy, him go way—Philadelph—come home, no eat, no sleep, no sing, no laugh—alle ttime closs, kickee—kickee evly litte thing—alle ttime laise hell for evlybody. Boss Big Bloy, him no catch um happness Philadelph, Miste Chollie.”

“I fear something happened in Philadelphia, Wing,” said Gray thoughtfully.

“You sabe whatee mattee my Boss Big Bloy, Miste Chollie?” the old Chinaman asked plaintively.

“I haven’t the least idea, Wing.”

“Boss Big Bloy come back from Philadelph, bling Ilish man, Lally Shea—what fo, Miste Chollie?”

“Oh, just to give him work, I suppose. Really, I don’t know.” Gray accompanied his words with a shrug of his shoulders as if to signify that really he did not care.

Wing nodded with energy. “Ilish man, him alle gone, now. What fo Lally Shea make skippee Las Losas, Miste Chollie?”

“I’m sure I don’t know.”

The old Chinaman looked cautiously around and drawing a step nearer lowered his voice. “Miste Chollie, what fo Miste Jim Holdbrook stay Las Losas?”

“Mr. Holdbrook is Mr. Morgan’s guest, Wing, the same as I am,” Gray answered doubtfully.

Wing shook his head with an expression of deep disgust: “Ah-h Holdbrook man, *him* no fliend my Boss Big Bloy.”

“No?”

“No, Holdbrook, him alle ttime go Alivaca, eat

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with soldee man. Soldee man no come eat Las Losas any mo. Ol ttime come—catch um good ttime—eat, sing, laugh—no come now, Holdblook go Alivaca.”

Gray, feeling perhaps that such gossip with a servant, even a servant of Wing Foo’s long and faithful years, was not exactly the thing, made no reply.

But Wing persisted: “Yo fatha an my Boss Big Bloy fatha, they long ttime good fliends, Miste Chollie—you fatha, he come stay Las Losas, two, thlee, fo ttime. You come one ttime too. Ol Boss Molgan, him tell ‘tlake good care my fliend, Miste Glay, Wing, tlake care little bloy Chollie, too.’ Ol Wing Foo, him sabe fliends, Miste Chollie. Boss Big Bloy an you fliends, alle lighte.”

“Very true, Wing.”

“Holdblook man, that mo diffent?”

“I have noticed it myself,” returned Gray dryly, with a faint smile.

“My Boss Big Bloy, him no likee Holdblook man, samee him likee you.”

“No?”

The old Chinaman, smiling, shook his head, then he asked anxiously: “Holdblook man, him yo fliend, Miste Chollie?”

“Well, not exactly, Wing.”

“Holdblook, him come flom Philadelph, too, alle samee Lally Shea—alle samee you?”

“Yes.”

“You know Holdblook man in Philadelph, Miste Chollie?”

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"Oh, I know who the Holdbrooks *are*." Gray's tone was as if he had said: "I know *what* the Holdbrooks are."

"You know Ilish man, Lally, in Philadelph?"

"No, never heard of him until Mr. Morgan picked him up."

With another cautious look about, the Chinaman said in a voice but little above a whisper: "Miste Chollie—Ilish man, Lally Shea an Holdblook man, they good fliends."

"The deuce, you say!" ejaculated Gray, startled out of his indifference.

Wing bobbed his head vigorously, and there was a knowing look in the yellow old eyes that peered sharply through their narrowed, slanting lids. "Holdblook man, him good fliends Injun Pete an Dololes gal. You sabe Injun Pete an Dololes gal, Miste Chollie?"

"No, can't say that I do."

"Injun Pete, him no Injun, him squaw man—boss Black Canyon Lanch—you sabe Black Canyon?"

"Oh, yes, I remember Black Canyon—a bad lot."

"Dololes gal, she bad lot, too—all Black Canyon bad lot—Injun Pete, him steal Las Losas cows. Boss Big Bloy, Long Jo and cowbloys catch um bly an bly, hang um bly neck."

"That ought to contribute something toward the happiness of all parties concerned," said Gray, rising and going to retrieve his book. With the recovered volume he again settled himself in his chair and began turning the pages.

The Chinaman, accepting the hint, shuffled to the

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table and picking up his tray and glass started for the kitchen. At the kitchen door, as if unable to forego a last word of warning, he turned: "You mind ol Wing Foo, Mistee Chollie, Injun Pete him bad. Holdblook fliends Dololes gal, no good. Ilish man Lally, fliends Holdblook, no good. You watchee, Mistee Chollie—you good fliend my Boss Big Bloy alle samee you fatha an him fatha. Damn Injun Pete, steal Las Losas cows."

The screen door closed with a bang. Charlie Gray once more was alone with his book. But the student could not take up again the thought of his author where he had dropped it. Mechanically he turned the pages but his mind balked. Nor could he now give himself to the contemplation of his own unhappiness—a mental habit in which he too often found a sad satisfaction. Wing Foo had lifted him bodily, as it were, from his immersion in the slough of his own ills and, after giving him a vigorous shake or two, had plunged him head over heels into the woes of his friend, Morgan. The truth of the matter was, Charlie Gray did not wish to consider the troubles of any one. He had somehow convinced himself that his own troubles were quite sufficient and with no pains to find a reason, had denied the intrusion of any interest that might divert him from his own miserable self pity. He was angry with the "unspeakable ass" who had reached him through a book. He was provoked that the old Chinaman should have accomplished, in a way so different, the same thing. It was in this mood that he observed a horseman approaching the big

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gate. "And there," said he to himself, "is another! And my doctor sent me out here for a complete rest and mental relaxation!"

The horseman dismounted to open the gate, thereby testifying to the fact that he, too, was not of Arizona. Leading his horse to the corral he turned the animal into the enclosure without troubling himself to remove saddle or bridle. As he walked toward the house, Gray watched him with a speculative eye.

The man was dressed, not in the garb of a western rider, but in that costume which prevails where horsemen of fashion trot sedately along the bridle paths of city parks. He was about Gray's height but heavier; his age this side of thirty; but there was that in his tanned face and in his dark eyes which told of a worldly knowledge beyond his years.

Coming through the gate in the picket fence with the air of one entirely at home he brought a chair from the porch to the shade of the umbrella tree and seating himself proceeded to light a cigarette. "Morgan home yet?" he asked.

"No," returned Gray. "Evidently he found some business to detain him."

The other laughed. "Business—yes."

Ignoring the man's manner, Gray asked casually: "And how did you find everything in the metropolis of Arivaca to-day?"

The man indicated his disgust: "As lively as usual. How these Arizona natives manage to exist is more than I can understand. You seem to be doing fairly well though," he looked Gray over in a

manner which was at once both deferential and contemptuous.

Gray managed a wan smile.

"Feeling any better?"

The other answered wearily: "I hardly know—a little perhaps, thank you."

"I should think it would be good for you to stir around more. To sit here day after day, as you do, with your nose in a book would make a well man sick. Why don't you get out—do something—go somewhere?"

"Do something—go somewhere!" the student returned with petulant heat. "Good Lord, Holdbrook, what is one to do? Where is one to go?"

Jim Holdbrook laughed. "Our distinguished scholar, Charles Madison Gray, is not exactly enjoying life at Las Rosas, I take it."

Two spots of color appeared in the pale cheeks of the man in the easy chair. "And are you so happy here?" he retorted. "You must find this life quite different, I fancy, from the life to which you have—ah—been accustomed."

"Well, you see," laughed the other with sneering insolence, "being a simple soul and not so dependent as yourself upon the higher culture, I am able to find an occasional bright spot—even in the deadly monotony of *this* arid waste."

Gray, remembering what Wing Foo had said of Holdbrook's friendships, felt himself again prodded out of his self-interest to an interest in this man from whom, up to this moment, he had resolutely held himself aloof. "Seriously, Holdbrook, do you enjoy

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this ranch life? You have been here some time now, I understand."

Holdbrook replied in the manner of one who counts his days: "July first—five weeks from to-day—I will have been here exactly one year." He threw his cigarette from him with a gesture of violent anger. "Do I *like* it? My friend, if I had to choose again between Las Rosas and hell, I'd go to hell with bells on."

"Well, if you feel that way about it," began Gray.

But the other interrupted him with: "I don't wonder that Morgan turns himself loose occasionally. He has funny ideas of what's decent though, leaving his guests to cool their heels in this dreary hole while he treats himself to a gay time in town. Sample of the famous Western hospitality, I suppose."

Hiding his disgust at this criticism of their host, Gray replied: "Jack is really worried about Larry O'Shea."

"Oh, yes, Larry O'Shea," laughed the other, and Gray felt, somehow, that the laughter this time was aimed, not at himself but at Morgan. Holdbrook continued: "And do you actually think it was because of that missing Irishman that Morgan stayed in town last night?"

"I don't think I care to discuss Morgan's affairs," returned Gray coldly.

"Oh, you don't. Well, let me tell you, there are a lot of people discussing your friend, Morgan, just the same. If you had been here as long as I have you wouldn't be so darned finicky about it. Hasn't it struck you as strange that the fellows from the post at Arivaca never come near the house any more?"

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"Really," murmured Gray protestingly.

"Yes, really," mocked Holdbrook. "The fact is, they have all dropped him flat. There is a limit, you know, even for men who may indulge in an occasional fling themselves. Morgan has gone away beyond that limit. In plain English, he is going to the devil, and he's going fast."

Charlie Gray was far from thinking of himself now. Holdbrook's animosity was too evident. A mind less keen than Gray's, even, would have detected the sinister purpose that lay beneath the surface of what might otherwise have been mere idle gossip. But why, if this was the fellow's feeling toward Morgan, was he a guest at Las Rosas? It was his loyalty to his friend that prompted Gray to say dryly: "I have noticed that *you* spend considerable time with the officers at the post."

"I do—they're fine fellows. I really don't know how I should have managed without their friendship. You should know them."

"Perhaps I may have that pleasure," returned Gray smoothly. "You seem to be more fortunate than Morgan in the matter of friendship."

Holdbrook acknowledged the hit with a shrug of indifference. Gray watched him light another cigarette then said casually: "Let me see, you met Morgan at the time of his visit to my home, I believe?"

"But not at your home," said Holdbrook grimly.

Gray smiled as he returned in a tone of mild agreement: "Oh, no, certainly not at my home."

The other, as if somewhat peeved, said sharply:

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"And let me tell you something else, Gray, your friend Morgan enjoyed a number of adventures while in Philadelphia that you and your father never dreamed of."

"It appears that he did," came the gentle retort. "But really, Holdbrook," he added with more firmness, "we are passing the bounds of good taste, don't you think? Let's drop it."

The other moved restlessly to and fro. "I know I had no business to say what I did," he jerked out, "but devil take it, Gray, I hate everything in this God-forsaken country so, that I have even come to hate myself. You can't imagine what a hell it has been for me away out here at this end of nowhere."

"I can easily understand that," said the other kindly, smiling at the thought that he, a Gray, could hold anything in common with a Holdbrook. "But why—pardon me—why, if you are so miserable here, do you stay?"

Holdbrook paused to stand before him aggressively. "Well, if you hate it so, what are you doing here?"

"I am under doctor's orders, you know," murmured the man in the chair.

Holdbrook grinned maliciously. "Perhaps I am too." And with that he turned abruptly and went into the house.

CHAPTER VI

BIG BOY MORGAN'S INHERITANCE

WHILE Charlie Gray, against his will, was listening to Holdbrook's gossip about the master of Las Rosas, Morgan, coming home, stopped his car on top of a hill a few miles away. From that elevation he could see, not only the ranch buildings but many miles of the range—grassy hills and flats and mountains—over which he had ridden since he was old enough to sit in a saddle. To any one, that scene would have been of surpassing beauty and grandeur. To the son of the pioneer, John Morgan, it was more—it was home. Every feature of the landscape was to him associated with those memories which all men hold most dear—the memories of father and mother and a happy childhood. In the reckless excitement of the hours just past there had been no thought of his home and of all that he had inherited from his parents. There had been no thought of the future and of the accounting which he, in his turn, must make of that which had been committed to him. But now, as he sat there with his material inheritance before him and his inheritance of that more enduring wealth in his heart, he thought, he remembered, he felt. He had recklessly taken the proffered

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cup of pleasure in the hope of a few hours' freedom from whatever burden it was that so troubled him. He had now to drink the dregs of his folly. The best of him was there, inseparable in his mind and heart from Las Rosas—his inheritance. Before that best the worst of him stood for judgment.

It was some time later when he finally arrived at the big gate. When he had driven his car into the shed which did duty as a garage, he did not cross the yard to the house but made his way through the barn to the corrals in the rear.

The first thing that caught his eye was Holdbrook's horse which had been left with the bridle rein over the saddle horn and was thus unable to either eat or drink. With a muttered opinion of any man who had so little regard for the comfort of his mount, Morgan relieved the animal and after hanging the saddle and bridle in the shed where they belonged went to sit on the edge of a manger while watching the grateful creature at the watering trough. The drowsy hum of flies, the occasional stamp of a horse's hoof, the contented cluck-cluck of a mother hen with the soft peep-peep of her chicks and the cooing of the doves on the barn roof were the only sounds to break the quiet of the late afternoon. And presently as the man sat there the place was filled with memories. Every weather-beaten board in the old barn, every post in the stockade corral, every corner and cranny in the shed, every bit of the gear hanging here and there—discarded horseshoes, ends of old straps, worn-out girths and fragments of broken riatas—

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cried aloud to him of all that had gone into the making of his manhood. He felt a soft muzzle against his shoulder. Without looking up he knew, and put out his hand with a welcoming caress to his mother's horse, Sarco, the pet and pride of Las Rosas. Sarco was old now, but his snow-white coat still had the sheen of silver—his mighty limbs were without a blemish, his soft gentle eyes were unafraid and if he moved with the quiet dignity of his years, he still carried his head with the grace and pride of one who knows that he is not of the common herd. Since the death of Morgan's mother the old horse had never felt a bit in his mouth or known the weight of a rider. Wing Foo, coming to the barn for eggs, as he had come at that hour of the day since before Big Boy was born, found the master of Las Rosas with his arm about the old horse's neck, his face buried in the snowy mane.

For some time the old Chinaman stood in the doorway of the barn silently watching. Then he shuffled across the corral. "Whatee mattee, Boss Big Bloy?" he said softly. "You clome home, no clome to house. You no catch um lunch. You hungly?"

Morgan lifted his face and looked at him over Sarco's neck. "I'm just a plain damned fool, Wing, I—I'm plumb crazy, I reckon."

"Ah-h, whatee mattee you—evlybody clazy littee bit, Boss Big Bloy, you clome long klitchen, old Wing Foo fix um eat, dlink, that mo bettee."

"Gray and Holdbrook are at the house, I suppose," returned Morgan drearily.

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"Miste Chollie lead blook—alle ttime. Too much blook no good. Holdblook man, Alivaca, clome back bout hour. Why soldee man no come Las Losas like samee ol ttime, Boss Big Bloy?"

"Can't stand me, I guess," returned Morgan grimly. "God knows I don't blame them—I can't stand myself."

"Ah-h-h, me sabe, Holdblook man, him fliend soldee man him no you fliend, me sabe. What fo Holdblook man stop Las Losas likee yo fliend Miste Chollie, heh, Boss Big Bloy?"

"Never mind, Wing, it'll be all right."

"Ah-h-h, Holdblook man, him alle long. You flind Ilish bloy, Lally Shea, Tucson?"

"No, I didn't find him, but I think I know where he is. Come on, I suppose I might as well face those fellows at the house and have it over."

When the ranchman joined his guests, Holdbrook commented mercilessly on what he called Morgan's "day after" appearance. With knowing laughter he asked about his host's business in town and the missing Larry O'Shea and carried his offensive fun to such a length that Gray made an excuse and retired in disgust to his room.

Morgan, who had made no attempt to defend himself from Holdbrook's crude wit, gloomily watched his friend's departure.

"I fear Señor Gray will not bless us with his presence long," jeered Holdbrook.

Morgan looked at him. "I can't say that I would blame Charlie for cutting his visit short under the circumstances."

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"Meaning me?" demanded the other.

"Meaning both you and myself," returned Morgan.

"I see. It is a pity, isn't it, that Gray, with all his learning, lacks the ability to amuse himself. If he had *our* talents now—"

"Cut that!" said Morgan shortly. "Rag me all you please but don't try your wit on Charlie Gray."

Holdbrook flushed but held his tongue.

"Speaking of amusements," said Morgan slowly. "I have felt some time that I ought to warn you, Holdbrook, about your little affair with Dolores."

"Warn me? You? That *is* good. Really, you know, I grew up several years ago. I may add that I have been taking care of Jim Holdbrook ever since."

"All right," returned Morgan, "if you're satisfied it suits me."

"I suppose you mean that man of yours, Pablo?"

"You've guessed it," said the ranchman dryly. "Pablo and Dolores were very much sweethearts when you broke into the game."

"Bah! I should worry!"

"But you are not in Philadelphia now, Holdbrook, and Pablo is—"

"A Mexican cow puncher," sneered Holdbrook.

"Exactly—" retorted Morgan, "one of the best all round men that ever busted a bronc or roped a steer, and very much in love with the girl you are taking away from him."

As Morgan spoke, the sound of horses' feet came from beyond the bunk house and the next moment a

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group of riders appeared loping toward the barn corral.

"The boys are here, Wing," Morgan called to the old Chinaman who was filling a pail at the pump. "Well, Holdbrook, I have had my say—take it or leave it."

"Alle lightee Boss Big Bloy," answered Wing Foo as he shuffled toward the house with his pail of water. As Gray appeared at the end of the porch he paused to add: "Catch um happness, no catch um happness, alle samee clowbloys eat, eat, alle ttime, Miste Chollie." Then to Morgan: "Bly an bly, Miste Chollie he eat alle samee clowbloy, Boss Big Bloy—ol Wing Foo, him sabe. Catch um suppee now." He disappeared into his kitchen.

To the uninformed, a cattle ranch is a cattle ranch. To those who know, there are ranches and ranches—from the great outfits that hold many miles of range and number their cattle by the thousands to the poor little nesters who squat at some water hole, build a shack and a brush corral, and put their brands on any animals they dare appropriate from the herds of their neighbors. To the uninitiated, a cowboy is a cowboy, but to those who know these picturesque men of the corrals and ranges, they offer a variety of characters as wide as can be found among any other class, profession or trade. The Morgan ranch, notwithstanding the neglected appearance of the home buildings and grounds, was, in the vernacular of Arizona, no "rawhide outfit." It follows that the Las Rosas riders were the finest types of Arizona cowboys—than whom, by the standards of loyalty,

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courage, honesty, and efficiency, there is no finer body of men anywhere in the world. Long Jo, the foreman, was a "top hand" at Las Rosas before the present boss of the outfit was born. There was not a man among them who was not proud of the standing that was his because of the fact that he rode for Big Boy Morgan.

The three men under the umbrella tree watched them as they came from the corrals across the big yard toward the house, walking with the wide awkward stride of those who live in the saddle. There was Curly, a well set up young man, rather good-looking, with light, wavy hair and laughing blue eyes; Maricopa Bill, a grizzly old timer, tall, gaunt, and hard, with a long, solemn face seamed and weather-beaten, a sandy gray moustache, and thin gray hair; Stub, short in stature, with a round, smooth-shaven countenance; and Pablo, a handsome young Mexican of twenty-two or three. Before they were half way to the house, Morgan knew there was something wrong.

Gray greeted them with a kindly "Hello, boys," to which Curly responded with a somber "Hello," Bill with a gruff "Howdy" and Stub with an attempt at cheerfulness—"How's the egg market to-day, Mr. Gray?"

"Eggs are still going down, Stub," returned Gray laughingly. "Seems to be an over supply."

But not a man smiled. In grim silence they took off their spurs, pulled themselves out of their chaps, threw their hats aside and busied themselves at the pump and with the wash basins at the bench near

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the corner of the bunk house toward the kitchen door. It was clear now, to even Gray and Holdbrook, that there was something wrong.

After regarding them silently for a little, Morgan spoke: "Where's Long Jo?"

At first no one seemed inclined to answer, then Maricopa Bill said gruffly: "Jo'll be along directly, I reckon, Mr. Morgan."

"I noticed you brought in that pinto horse that's been missing lately. Where did you pick him up?"

The cowboys looked at one another and, at last, Curly turned from the big roller towel to say slowly: "I ran on to him over near Yellow Jacket."

Morgan's next question was pointed: "Did any of you boys see or hear anything of Larry to-day?"

Curly renewed his efforts with the towel, the others had their faces buried in the wash basins.

"Well?" said Morgan.

Stub reached for his share of the towel. "The waterin' place at Eagle Spring is in mighty bad shape, Mr. Morgan."

"Them yearlin's over on the south side of the flat jest ain't doin' no good a-tall," volunteered Maricopa Bill.

And Curly, busy now with a comb before the broken mirror, contributed: "There is a bad break in the drift fence just south of Black Butte, sir."

Morgan waited a moment—then: "Pablo."

"Señor Morgan?"

"Pablo, did you look over the horses in the west pasture to-day?"

Pablo glanced toward the others who at the ques-

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tion had suddenly ceased their operations. With a slight shrug of his shoulders as one would say "any one can see how helpless I am," he answered: "*Si, señor.*"

"Larry O'Shea's horse—the blazed face roan, that he bought for himself from the X Bar X outfit, I mean—Larry's horse is still running with our bunch, is he?"

"I no see him to-day, Señor Morgan. Mebby so, that roan hoss him stray. Always was little bronco, that roan hoss."

"What horse was Larry riding the day he disappeared?"

"Larry, he ride las' time big pinto, I think."

"You *think!* Don't you know?"

"*Si, Señor.*"

Morgan looked at Gray. "You see, Charlie, Larry rode the pinto when he left the ranch. Now Curly finds the pinto running loose on the range, and the boy's own horse is missing."

Gray glanced at Holdbrook and wondered at the tense expression on the man's face.

Maricopa Bill spoke in his gentle drawl: "It shows the fool kid ain't no hoss thief at any rate."

Morgan turned again to Pablo: "Why didn't Long Jo come in with you boys?"

The vaquero was clearly grateful for this opportunity of passing on the boss's questions to some one else: "Curly and Stub, they with Long Jo, I not with them."

Curly said reluctantly: "Stub and Long Jo and me was over on the far side of Yellow Jacket and

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met up with Red Gordon who's ridin' for the X Bar X. Red said when he was comin' in from Tres Bellotas yesterday he seen Larry and Injun Pete together. Jo quits us a few minutes later."

"Which way did he go?" asked Morgan quickly.

"He was headed toward Black Canyon the last we see of him."

"What time was that?"

"About two o'clock," he looked at Stub.

"'Bout that, I'd say," agreed Stub.

The silence which followed was broken by Wing Foo, who stepped from the kitchen and with a short iron bar beat lustily upon a steel triangle which hung beside the door. "Clome an get it!" he shouted. "Clome an get it—me thlow it out."

The cowboys were moving toward their dining-room when Pablo said: "Long Jo, he comin' now, Señor Morgan," and the next moment the foreman appeared over the brow of the hill beyond the barn. With common consent they waited.

Leaving his horse in the corral the foreman went straight to Morgan. It was characteristic of the man that, even though it was he who put Big Boy Morgan on his first horse, he waited for his employer to speak.

It was as characteristic of the young ranchman that he wasted no time in preliminaries. "What do you know, Jo?"

With a quick glance toward the cowboys, Jo answered as if he had been present during the preceding conversation: "After hearin' Red's story, I figured you'd want to know more and that it wouldn't

be a bad idea for me to take a look around Pete's place in Black Canyon." He paused as if reluctant to continue.

"Yes," said Morgan encouragingly.

"I knowed Pete's squaw would be on the lookout as usual, so I cut back from the trail aimin' to hit the rim of the canyon above the ranch house at some spot where I could leave my horse and wiggle around amongst the rocks until I could see what there was to see without disturbin' anybody."

"Well?"

"The boy is there all right, sir. As much at home as if he owned the place."

In the silence which followed Wing Foo again appeared in the kitchen doorway. Waving his arms angrily he called: "Clome an get it—clome an get it. Whatee mattee, you bloys—alle samee sick? Alle tlime me callee clome an get it you clome lunnin'—whatee mattee you to-night—you no want eat I clean um dishes!"

The cowboys moved slowly toward the house.

"I jest can't see it, Big Boy," said Long Jo deliberately. "We all know, of course, that the kid was inclined to be—wall sort o' set against everybody what drawed a bigger pay check than he did, but I sure never thought he was the kind to throw in with that Black Canyon outfit."

"You are dead right, Jo," returned Morgan heartily. "Larry is not naturally the kind of a man to go as far as that. There is something in this that we don't know about."

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Jo looked at Gray. "I reckon it must be that thar sister o' his that's at the bottom of it, sir."

"By thunder!" exclaimed Morgan. "I hadn't thought of *that*."

"What about O'Shea's sister, Jo?" asked Gray.

"Why, you see, sir, she's back in Ireland takin' care o' their mother—Larry was tellin' me some time ago as how the old lady was pretty bad sick and how he was a wishin' he had more money to send 'em. Seems like he worried about 'em a heap."

"Yes," said Morgan, "and there is a letter for him—came the day he left. But why didn't he tell me, Jo, if he needed more money?"

Long Jo hesitated. "Well—you see, sir, the boy had got a notion somehow that you was havin' trouble enough o' your own right now, without him a worryin' you, an' that you'd sort o' lost interest in him, like. Leastways that's how he put it up to me. I tried to tell him different, but he'd got it into his head that way an' wouldn't listen to nothin' else."

At this, Holdbrook, who had kept in the background, an interested but silent listener, laughed aloud. "That sister stuff is good," he said as the others faced him. "O'Shea is a common Irish crook; I know his kind."

Again Charlie Gray was reminded of what Wing had said about Holdbrook's friendship for Larry O'Shea. This did not look like friendship.

Before Morgan or Gray could speak Long Jo went a step toward Holdbrook. "I wouldn't be sayin' that if I was you, sir—not where the boys

could hear. We all know the kid warn't no top hand and thet he grumbled a heap about things in general, but that's a long way from what you're a callin' him."

"How do you account for his leaving Las Rosas for Black Canyon then?" demanded Holdbrook. And to Gray, at least, the questioner seemed to show a deeper interest than his position as a guest warranted.

Long Jo looked him up and down then answered easily: "I ain't accountin' for it any more than I'm accountin' for Larry bein' so thick with you or for you a-runnin' after that Black Canyon girl, Dolores. I only know that the boy has thrown in with them rustlers and that when we round up the bunch, as we're bound to do sooner or later, we'll sure take him in with the rest, but I'm here to tell you that me an' the boys will attend to said festivities without any o' your put-in. Considerin' everything, we ain't wantin' to hear none o' your opinion about him neither. After all, Mr. Gray, it takes a man with some nerve to be a cattle rustler—tain't like tradin' in women."

"Jo!" said Morgan sharply.

"Yes, sir, I'm goin' to supper right now."

As Long Jo disappeared through the kitchen-door, Holdbrook, without a word, went into the house by way of the front veranda.

Gray and Morgan stood looking at each other in puzzled silence. There was just a suspicion of a whimsical smile on the scholarly countenance of the man from Philadelphia. The big ranchman

turned away and fixed his eyes thoughtfully upon the distant Yellow Jacket Peak.

"Did you know about O'Shea's people, Jack?" asked Charlie.

"In a general way—he told me quite a lot about this sister Nora. She raised him, it seems. Mighty fine girl, I judge, from what he has told me at different times."

"What about his friendship with Holdbrook? Jim didn't talk as if there was much to it on his side—why should Long Jo make such a point of it?"

Morgan stirred uneasily. "Oh, Jo gets funny notions sometimes, Charlie. The truth is, none of the boys care much for Holdbrook."

"If I am not being too inquisitive, Jack, what kind of a chap was this Irishman, really? He always impressed me as being rather a decent sort."

"Why, he is—take him all 'round. I picked him up in Philadelphia, you know. He had some sort of a job at one of the clubs where I went occasionally. He found out that I was from the West and managed to ask me a good many questions about conditions out here. I rather liked him. He seemed ambitious—was dissatisfied with his position, and so I offered to take him on here at Las Rosas. He was wild to come. He has turned out fairly well—of course, we don't expect too much of a tenderfoot, you know. I imagine he would really do better at something in town, but on account of what he has told me of his sister I have kept him on until he could get acquainted with the country and find some sort of a job that would satisfy him. Long Jo has told

me several times that the boy was inclined to talk a lot of stuff that didn't sound altogether healthy for a youngster."

"What sort of talk do you mean, Jack?"

"Why, you heard what Jo said—that the boy was set against everybody who drew a larger pay check than he."

"Oh! But was he all right toward you?"

"So far as I know. What Jo just said is all news to me. No one could ever make me believe, Charlie, that Larry O'Shea is bad. He is a little weak, perhaps, and easily influenced, and he seems to have picked up somewhere a lot of fool ideas about our American capitalists and politicians and labor classes that were not good for him to brood over. But I certainly never would have thought that he could turn out like this. It seems to be largely my fault, too, I suppose I ought to have given the boy more attention. But I—Oh, hell—what's the use."

In spite of Morgan's apparent frankness Charlie Gray felt that there was something in the situation which his friend had not revealed. One thing was clear. Big Boy Morgan was greatly disturbed and downcast. Rising and putting his hand affectionately on his friend's shoulder, Gray said in a lighter vein: "Cheer up, old man, isn't it one of your western philosophies that 'life is just one damn thing after another?'"

Morgan tried to smile as he got to his feet. "There's one thing sure, Charlie, if misery loves company, there's no one at Las Rosas need feel

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lonesome. Come, let's go and see what breed of eggs Wing has for supper."

"At least," returned Gray, as they moved arm in arm toward the veranda, "we cannot complain that our troubles lack variety."

"That's right, Charlie, so far as I can see we have every brand of unhappiness there is—except one."

"Except one," agreed Gray seriously, "a woman—if only we had a woman at Las Rosas, Jack, our unhappiness would be complete."

At this very moment the Tucson-Arivaca stage stopped where the road to Las Rosas branches off from the main highway.

"This here's the place, ma'am," said the driver. "Jest foller that thar road, it'll take you straight to the house."

The passenger addressed, alighted. The stage moved on.

While the cowboys of Las Rosas were engaged with their evening meal, and the master of the ranch, with his guests, was sitting down to the table in the owner's dining-room, a young woman was making her way fearfully toward the home of Big Boy Morgan. The young woman wore a queer-looking dress and carried a funny bundle.

CHAPTER VII

A WOMAN AT LAS ROSAS

THE sun was touching the crest of the western mountains. Long shadows lay over the seas of grass and gathered thick in canyon, ravine, and hollow. Nora O'Shea, toiling along that road over the rolling hills, shrank in terror from the immensity of the scene that was so different from any landscape she had ever known. On the ridges she felt herself alone and defenseless in a strange and uninhabited land. Through the narrow little valleys and sandy washes where dense thickets of mesquite shut in the unfenced way she crept weak and trembling with dread of the fierce wild beasts that she knew must be lurking near. In vain she argued with herself that there must be people living in the vicinity. But what sort of people would live in such a land? The answer was obvious—Indians, outlaws, cruel, desperate characters who would not even speak in a tongue that she could understand. The driver of the stage had told her it was only three miles to Las Rosas but she had already, she thought, walked much farther than that, and there was no sign of a great estate such as she had pictured from her knowledge of the country homes of Irish gentlemen. She was sure, now, that the man

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had tricked her. He had taken advantage of her ignorance to leave her helpless against his evil designs. Some one would come for her presently—either the man himself or a lawless confederate. Every few yards she paused to listen fearfully and to look with terror stricken eyes in every direction. The deep, rumbling voice of a bull came from somewhere behind her and she sank to the ground, crouching beside her bundle. The heavy menacing rumble became a bellowing challenge. She was certain that it was coming nearer. With a low cry she sprang to her feet and ran—staggering and stumbling. A coyote slipped across the road in front of her, and she again dropped to the ground beside her bundle. A startled jack-rabbit leaped for cover. A covey of quail rose in noisy whirring flight. The bull's challenge was answered by a rival. Desperate with terror the girl forced herself to go on.

From the top of the ridge north of the pond she saw the ranch buildings, and her poor heart leaped with hope of safety. The sun had dropped below the mountains now, and the dusk of early twilight came upon the land. Past the pond which gave back the afterglow of the western sky the Irish girl hurried on her way. But as she approached the house, her fears again possessed her. Surely this could not be the home of Mr. Morgan, her idealized American gentleman. These rude buildings, neglected and old, could not be the ranch—or as she thought of it—the estate of which Larry had written her. Convinced that she had somehow in her fright missed her road, wondering fearfully what sort of

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people could be living in such a place, dreading to present herself to the unknown dangers ahead yet fearing to retrace her steps, she stood hesitating at the big gate.

The murmur of men's voices came from the dining-room where the cowboys were eating their evening meal. From the room where Morgan and his guests sat at table there was no sound. Save for an occasional low-spoken fragment of a forced attempt at conversation they ate in silence. Then a burst of laughter came from the cowboys and Pablo stepped from the house. But from the gate Nora could not see the Mexican nor could she hear distinctly the conversation which followed.

As Pablo paused beside the door to roll a cigarette a bantering voice from within called: "Cheer up, old sport, he ain't got her yet." "It sure beats my time how this here love sickness throws a good hombre like Pablo off his feed," said another. And a third called: "Go get that thar guitar of yours, Pablo, and jerk us a tune out of her. Do you good—we can stand it."

Pablo, as he gave the final dextrous twist to his cigarette, called back to them: "That's all right, you boys, mebby so, I don't eat much 'cause I love." He struck a match. "Mebby so, to love is to be unhappy. Somebody else—he be unhappy too," he added as he went toward the bunk house.

Timidly Nora stole across the big yard. The sound of dishes mingling with the murmuring voices of the men told her the occupants of the place were at the table. Fearfully she pushed open the gate

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in the picket fence and crept closer to the house. She listened, listened for the voice of a woman. Seizing the excuse that it would be better not to disturb them at their evening meal, she postponed the dreaded moment when for good or for ill she must reveal herself. She looked cautiously about the place. If only she could hear a woman's voice. If only she could see something to indicate a woman's presence. The chairs under the umbrella tree between the two buildings caught her eye. So tired that she could scarcely stand, weak and trembling with fear, the Irish girl crept toward the inviting seat. Surely there could be no harm in her resting a bit while waiting. With her bundle beside her she sank into the easy chair. And presently as she sat there a feeling of security crept over her. It might have been the restful comfort of the chair after her long ride from town and the fearful excitement of her walk after leaving the stage. It might have been the low murmur of the voices within the house, the peace and quiet of the evening, or, perhaps, it was the simple fact of that fence between her and the wild open country which lay beyond. Wearied and worn, almost beyond the limit of her endurance, the girl gratefully accepted the moment's respite and lying back in the big chair closed her eyes.

Pablo, with his guitar, was about to step from the bunk house when he caught sight of the figure under the umbrella tree and paused in the doorway. Who was she? His quick glance covered the big yard on the other side of the picket fence. There was no horse, no automobile, no vehicle—how then

did she come? Why had she not made her presence known? She seemed to be asleep. Wonderingly, the Mexican went softly toward the girl in the easy chair. He opened his mouth to speak but hesitated fearing to startle her. He looked questioningly toward the house thinking he should tell Morgan. Then the humor of the situation struck him and smiling at the thought of the surprise in store for the men of Las Rosas he retreated silently to the bench at the end of the bunk house to await developments.

But Pablo, in common with many who chance upon a situation to their liking, could not let well enough alone. Soft and low the sweet strains of music such as she had never heard stole into the consciousness of the tired girl under the umbrella tree. So faint and far away, so poignantly sweet it came to her, that she did not move. The voices in the house were hushed. Giving herself up to the plaintive, soothing melody, she forgot everything in the restfulness of the moment.

Suddenly the spell was broken by a loud report. With a scream of terror the Irish girl leaped to her feet and faced the chagrined Mexican who bowed and smiled with excessive politeness in his attempt to reassure her.

"It ees nothing—it ees nothing, Señora. Don' be scare." He moved toward her, holding out his guitar. "It ees damn guitar string, she all time go bust—bang."

At the approach of this dark-faced man, who spoke a language she had never before heard, Nora

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O'Shea, beside herself with fear, retreated until her back was against the trunk of the tree. The cowboys came through the kitchen door with a rush. Morgan and his guests appeared on the veranda. Almost before she could catch her breath, the terror-stricken girl found herself surrounded by men.

For a moment they all stood speechless with amazement, then Long Jo turned to Pablo, who was evidently the cause of the young woman's scream. "Well," said the foreman sternly, "what are you trying to pull off here, anyhow?"

"It ees damn guitar string, Jo," Pablo explained earnestly. "She all time go bust, bang, you know."

The foreman faced toward Nora inquiringly.

Trembling with excitement the girl cried: "The saints be my judges, sir, but that black devil shot a gun at me!"

"No, no," protested Pablo. "La Señora ees mistake. I jus' make little music, that ees all. I think no fright Señora. I no mean to hurt."

With the courage of her desperate situation and the aroused pride of the O'Sheas, the Irish girl demanded: "What's that name he's callin' me, sir? 'Tis a respectable woman I am if I do be wanderin' alone in this devil's own country that God has cursed with everything that a decent woman fears, and I'll not be misnamed by any of the devil's own brood that lives here."

The cowboys nudged and slapped one another, grinning and chuckling their admiration for the girl's spirit and their delight in the situation. Morgan started forward but Gray caught him by the

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arm. "Wait a minute, Jack," whispered the student, "this is too good, don't spoil it."

"Pablo, he ain't callin' no names, ma'am," Long Jo explained with grave kindness. "Señora—that there's jest Mex, meanin' missus."

Nora looked at him doubtfully. "Mistress, you say?"

"That's it, jest missus, ma'am."

The girl looked at the smiling, eager cowboys and drew a long breath of relief. "Thank you kindly, sir, but just the same, I'm not that either. 'Tis just plain myself that I am, and no missis at all." And then her glorious smile flashed upon them as she added: "Though I'm thinkin' maybe I should be thanking him for the compliment."

This was greeted by such a roar of honest wholesome laughter that Nora was reassured but, feeling of her arms, and shaking her skirts doubtfully, she said gravely: "Sure, sir, I felt the wind of the bullet when it went through my clothes." She looked at Pablo who was busying himself with the broken guitar string, then smiled again upon the grinning cowboys. "Faith, I've had as many things happen to me as could happen to any woman and her keeping her strength, but 'tis the first time in my life I was ever shot at with a queer fiddle thing like that."

At this there was such a demonstration that old Sarco put his head over the corral gate and looked toward the house as though wondering if the joyous Las Rosas of the past had somehow miraculously returned.

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"Pablo, he's sure some dangerous with that thar weapon, miss," said Stub.

"You see," Nora explained, "I was just sitting there in the chair, peaceful like, resting and waiting for you gentlemen to finish your—" another scream punctuated the unfinished sentence.

Drawn from his kitchen by the unusual laughter, Wing Foo was approaching the group. In one hand the excited Chinaman flourished a frying pan, in the other he held a long knife. Never before had the Irish girl beheld such a fearsome creature. She caught Long Jo's arm frantically. "For the love of the Virgin," she cried, "keep him off—take him away!"

There was no mistaking the genuineness of her appeal. The cowboys sprang between the girl and the Chinaman.

"There, there, miss," said Long Jo soothingly. "You ain't go no call to be scared."

Stub relieved Wing of his knife and Maricopa Bill took possession of the frying pan. Curly led the wondering Chinaman forward. "It's just old Wing Foo, our cook, miss. He ain't aimin' to hurt nobody, are you Wing?"

The old Chinaman nodded and grinned: "Alle lightee. You bloys catch um plenty laugh—me clome look see. What fo pletty lady she flaid?"

"You see, miss," said Jo, "Wing Foo, he ain't nothin' but a Chink."

And Maricopa Bill added solemnly: "Harmless as a suckin' dove."

This brought a low aside from Stub: "Shut up,

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you old fool, that ain't no way to talk before a lady."

"Hit ain't?" retorted Bill. "Much you know—them thar's scripter words, them are."

Morgan felt that it was time for him to interfere: "Easy, boys, easy," he said as he came forward. The men were instantly silent and he continued with kindly courtesy to Nora: "You have nothing to fear, miss. You are as safe here as you would be in your own home."

As the girl looked up at him, the relief and gladness which came into her face were pitiful. The men, kindly as they were, had not grasped the real terrors of her trying situation, but Nora O'Shea knew now that indeed she had found friends. No one could look into Big Boy Morgan's face and doubt the quality of his manhood. The girl's sea-gray eyes shown with admiration as she smiled her gratitude and confidence. "Sure, sir, and any woman with two eyes in her head could see that she would be safe anywheres with a true gentleman like you."

Her admiration was so evident, her words so spontaneous that Big Boy was, for the moment, too embarrassed to reply. The cowboys were again grinning and nudging one another at this turn of affairs.

The girl turned to them: "God love you all for the kind-hearted gentlemen you are, including the yellow one with the rope of hair down his back—though I mistook him at first because of the knife." She looked up at Morgan again. "Sure, sir, I don't

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know where I am at all, but wherever I am 'tis glad I am to be here. 'Tis so much better than where I was, do you see?"

"But how did you get here?" asked Morgan. "Where is your horse?"

"My horse?" she laughed. "My horse, is it?" She pointed to her feet. "There is my horse, sir, I've two of them. Shank's mares brought me, sir, I come on my two legs, no less."

"You walked?"

As if Morgan's exclamation were a signal, every man in the company caught up the nearest chair, stool or bench and strove for the honor of seating her. Nora, with a smile for the vanquished ones, accepted the chair offered by Morgan. The boys, drawing back a little, looked their disappointment.

"Thank you kindly, sir. It was a bit of a step—up and down those hills and through the thickets in between, and me with my bundle. 'Tis a queer country you have, sir—saving your presence, sir."

"But why are you afoot? Where did you walk from?"

The others listened with breathless interest, for by now every man in the outfit was ready to swear himself her devoted slave.

"'Twas from the cross roads beyond that I walked—though 'tis no road at all save a couple of wheel tracks. The stage, going to somewhere or other, brought me from that queer place you call Tucson. 'Twas night before last that I landed there by car train from New York. I come to New York by steamer from my old home." She favored the

group of men with that wondrous smile. "I'm thinking I'll not need to tell you that my old home is not in France or Germany or any of those foreign countries."

With quick glances at one another the cowboys drew closer together.

"You came all the way from Ireland straight here?" asked Morgan.

"I did, sir, from Kittywake, in County Clare. Though 'tis not straight that I came for there's many a crook and turn and twist in the way—and a long, long way it is."

When the young woman spoke the name of her home there was a quick movement of the little group of cowboys. Putting their heads together they exchanged low excited whispers. Morgan started and glanced at the others. Holdbrook went a step nearer. Then they waited, motionless, in a dead silence, for the inevitable question.

With an effort, Morgan spoke calmly: "May I ask your name, miss?"

"My name?"

"Yes, who are you?"

"And who else would I be but Nora O'Shea—Larry O'Shea's sister."

Big Boy Morgan was stunned. Helplessly he turned to the little group of men. Consternation was written in every face. As one who finds it difficult to believe what he has just heard, Morgan said doubtfully: "Larry O'Shea's sister!" While a murmur that was very like a groan came from the cowboys; and Gray, who was standing near Holdbrook

in the deeper shadow of the umbrella tree, distinctly heard a low-muttered oath.

"Sure, and I am that same, sir," said the Irish girl proudly. "'Tis me that raised Larry from a baby, being mother as well as sister to him." When the others did not speak she continued wearily: "You see, sir, I'm trying to get to a place they call Las Rosas—wherever that is, 'tis there my brother Larry do be working. I made sure that the boy would be waiting for me at the depot in Tucson when I landed, do you see. But there was never a sign of him though I watched for him every minute of the live-long day. You may believe, sir, I was near crazy with being alone in such a queer country and a-wondering what had happened to my boy that I was so wishful to see and all ready to take him in my arms when the cars stopped."

Morgan thought of the letter that had come for Larry the day he left the ranch.

"Well, then," continued Nora, "when the day was gone and no Larry, Mr. Zobetser invited me to stay at his home for the night."

At this the cowboys stirred uneasily and growled half inaudible comments but Morgan, with a quick glance at them, held up a warning hand.

The Irish girl could not but notice the effect of her words and with a flash of defiance said quickly: "He is a good man, is Mr. Zobetser, just the same, and a kind gentleman, too, in spite of what Mr. Crafts told me on the train—and so is the lady that works for him." Then she explained how she had met Crafts, Zobetser's son-in-law, how the motherless

baby had been fed, and how Jake Zobetser worshiped his grandchild and had taken it to raise as his own son. "And so I know, sir," she finished, "that Mr. Zobetser must be a good man because do you see no one could love a baby like he loves that little one and be bad."

Big Boy Morgan was trying desperately to find the key to a puzzling combination. He knew from his father the reason for Zobetser's hatred of the name of Morgan and the man's unscrupulous nature. He had little doubt as to the real character of the Black Canyon outfit. He was certain that Zobetser or his agent had persuaded Larry to become a member of his band of lawless riders. The head of the Black Canyon gang was too clever to overlook the danger that lay in permitting a woman like Nora O'Shea to become familiar with his operations, as the Irish girl through her brother would be sure to do. Why, then, had Zobetser not gotten rid of Larry's sister as he could so easily have done? Obviously the answer to that was the man's gratitude to the girl for her kindness to the baby. But why send her to Las Rosas where she would be certain to learn of Larry's connection with Black Canyon? Suddenly the answer came—it was Nora herself. Zobetser had been shrewd enough to see that because Nora was what she was the Las Rosas men would be the last in the world to tell her the truth about Larry, and that right on the Morgan ranch the Irish girl would be the least likely to meet her brother who had deserted from Las Rosas to join the Black Canyon outfit.

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"And so," he said aloud, "it was Mr. Zobetser who sent you here?"

"Indeed no, sir, it was to Las Rosas that Mr. Zobetser told me to go. 'Tis there,' says he, 'that you should go to find your brother,' and him laughing so when he told me that I made sure my troubles were that near over. 'Twas Mr. Zobetser himself put me on the stage, but 'twas me that lost myself somewhere on the way. The driver of the stage said to follow the road, which I did, but maybe he meant for me to turn one way or another—I don't know. Anyhow, 'tis Mr. Morgan's ranch I'm hunting. Maybe you know where it is, sir. And did you ever hear tell of Larry O'Shea?"

Morgan answered slowly: "This is Las Rosas."

"What's that you're saying?"

"This is the Morgan ranch."

Nora O'Shea looked up at him imploringly. "Please, sir, don't be joking with me. I know I'm not where I should be at all. But you'll not be making sport of me just for that."

"I'm not joking, Miss O'Shea, this is Las Rosas. I am Jack Morgan."

The truth that she had at last reached the end of her long, trying journey was almost more than the girl could bear. The last few hours had been so crowded with disappointments, worry, and fear that the sudden assurance of her safety was overwhelming. Then came the reaction. Beside herself with joy she threw her arms about Morgan's neck crying and laughing. "God bless you, sir, 'tis that happy I am to think I'm here at last.

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Are you sure, sir? Are you certain 'tis you? Faith, I don't know whether this is me or not. Are you sure 'tis you? And to think of me being here ever since I came and all the time thinking I was somewhere else."

The reaction of the cowboys was as spontaneous. Delighted at Morgan's embarrassment and entering into Nora's joy they laughed with one another and with her.

"He's Big Boy Morgan all right, miss."

"This here's sure Las Rosas."

"No mistake about it, miss, this here is us."

"By damn! La Señorita she make love wid the boss pretty quick, heh? Me, I think she come to the right place all the time."

"Fast work, I'd say," commented Holdbrook in a tone which caused Charlie Gray to look at him quickly.

"But where is my boy?" cried Nora eagerly. "Sure my brother Larry should be here with you all!" She looked anxiously around as if expecting to see him somewhere near.

The men, in their confusion, did not answer but stood silently consulting one another. How could they tell this girl that her brother had joined the notorious Black Canyon outfit?

Nora O'Shea's sea-gray eyes were wide with a new and greater fear. "For the love of Mary," she implored Morgan, "don't tell me that anything has happened to Larry. Oh, sir, not that—not that. Don't say that anything has happened to my boy." Overcome, she sank into a chair. "I mind so well

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the day he sailed for America," she moaned. "'Do you stay and take care of the mother, mavourneen,' says he, 'while I go and get rich for us all.' And all this time he's been sending the money to keep us. And now the mother is gone, and I'm come all the way from Ireland to make his home for him as he said I should."

Helpless before her grief and feeling themselves somehow the cause of her tears, the cowboys hung their heads and softly cursed themselves and Larry O'Shea.

It was the old Chinaman who relieved the situation: "Wing Foo, him sabe what mattee—Misse, she hungly, nicee cup tea that fix um pletty quick. Me catch um." He shuffled away toward his kitchen.

The men waited for the boss to speak. It was clearly his move. Would he—would he dare play the game?

Big Boy Morgan, in desperation, forced himself at last to say: "There, there, Miss O'Shea, don't do that. Larry is all right."

She raised her head and looked at him doubtfully. "He—he's all right, you say? The boy is all right?"

"Of course, he is," returned Morgan with a reassuring smile.

"The saints be praised, and I thought for a minute that he was gone and me left all alone."

"Alone nothin'!" ejaculated Stub. "We're all here, ain't we, boys?"

The responses were quick and hearty.

Nora smiled upon them as she said: "And no

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woman could want for better company. But why is Larry not here with you? 'Tis wishful I am to see my boy."

Stub began manfully: "Why Larry he—"

Curly hastily checked him: "You see, miss, Larry is—"

Long Jo put his hand with a warning grip on the cowboy's arm: "Where is Larry, Mr. Gray?

"Who—Larry?" faltered Gray, "Oh yes—why—why—he's just away, isn't he, Jack?"

"That's it, Miss O'Shea," said Morgan hopefully, "your brother is just away."

A little puzzled in spite of their cheerfulness Nora asked doubtfully: "But the boy is still in your service, sir? You haven't sent him from you and him writing me all the time what a grand man you were and how it was you that gave him the money we was needing when the mother was dying and I was to come to America?"

"Larry told you that I gave him the money?" asked Morgan doubtfully.

"Indeed, and he did, sir," smiled Nora. "Larry tells me everything, as he should." And gratitude and worship shone in the eyes of the Irish girl for her idealized American gentleman.

Holdbrook chuckled as he whispered to Gray: "He's caught with the goods this trip, all right—pretty smooth at that."

Gray motioned impatiently for him to be quiet.

The cowboys watched Morgan anxiously—would he continue the game after this?

"Yes, of course, your brother is still working for

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me," said Morgan deliberately. "You see, the fact is, Miss O'Shea, it was necessary for me to send some one I could trust down south on business of unusual importance. So, of course, Larry went."

The cowboys backed Big Boy's play with enthusiasm: "Ain't no one of us could hold a candle to Larry when it comes to real fine work, miss," said Curly.

"Trustworthiest man I ever knowed," agreed Long Jo.

"And 'tis myself that taught him to be all of that," cried Nora proudly. "'Tis a good boy he is."

"You bet your life," said Maricopa Bill.

And Stub, helping enthusiastically, cried: "'Send me, Mr. Morgan,' he says, says he and he's up an' gone."

"Just saddled up his horse and rode away," said Charlie Gray entering into the spirit of the occasion.

The Irish girl beamed upon them. "Sure, I know well that he would; did I not raise him myself?"

The men were not slow to observe the glorious effect of their praise of Nora O'Shea's brother and under the intoxicating spell of the Irish girl's delight would likely have gone to impossible lengths had Wing Foo not interrupted them.

The old Chinaman appearing on the front porch called cheerfully: "Clome an get it. Suppee leady, missee. Clome an get it."

Morgan led Nora to the dining-room, and the cowboys looked at one another in dead silence. Then

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Curly, heaving a mighty sigh, broke the spell: "She's a plumb wonder, ain't she? God, what a smile!"

Long Jo spoke thoughtfully: "It sure strikes me that this here outfit is a headed toward trouble."

"Wake cowboy an' ride!" breathed Stub softly.

"Did you notice how the Boss looked at her?"

"Like she was a reglar queen."

"Damn Larry O'Shea, I say."

"Damn nothin'—if I had a sister like her I'd steal cattle for her, too."

"An' her a-lookin' up an' a-smilin' at Big Boy like she thought he was all the high cards in the deck."

"It would be plain murder to tell her about Larry."

"Oh, Lord, have mercy on our sinful souls!"

"What are we goin' to do with her, that's what I'm meanin'?"

"You'd better be askin' what she's a goin' to do to us."

"Looks like she's already done it to the boss," this came in a whisper as Morgan appeared on the porch. It was easy to see that the master of Las Rosas was in a quandary.

"How do you figger it, Mr. Morgan," asked Long Jo, as if he were formally stating a question for discussion. "Will you send her back to town?"

"I don't see how we can do that," the young ranchman returned thoughtfully. "Suppose we told her the truth about her precious brother and sent her away—what would happen then? We don't want to forget that she is absolutely alone in a

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strange country. And we don't want to forget Jake Zobetser. Think of it—a girl like her! We can't send her back to town, Jo."

"I should say not," said Stub, speaking for all.

"But surely, Jack, you can't think of keeping her here," said Charlie Gray.

Morgan answered slowly: "We can't prevent her from finding out about Larry if we send her away."

"Hell's fire! There ain't only one thing we *can* do."

"We've just naturally got to keep her."

"That's right."

"Ain't no other way out."

"Yes," said Morgan, as one reaching a decision, "and every man in this outfit has got to ride herd on her to see that she doesn't learn the truth about Larry."

With one accord they endorsed Curly's reply: "We'll just naturally slaughter any son-of-a-gun that tells her the truth!"

"You ain't aimin' to git much work done the next few months, be you, Mr. Morgan?" asked Long Jo dryly.

Holdbrook laughed suggestively: "But why appoint so many to look after the lady, Jo? Why not turn her over to Gray here, unless," he finished with sneering insolence, "Morgan is planning to keep the job for himself."

The cowboys gazed at Holdbrook in a dead silence. They literally could not for a moment grasp the insinuation of the man's vulgar jest—if indeed it was a jest.

Morgan spoke coolly, "I am not so sure that I get your idea, Holdbrook."

"It's simple enough," returned Holdbrook, rather pleased with the impression he was making. "Here we have seven men, not counting the Chinaman, and one poor lonely Irish maid. Obviously, as Jo says, we can't all devote ourselves to her. My proposition is that we delegate one of our number to keep her amused and occupied—let the cards decide who it shall be. The high man gets the girl—to the victor belong the spoils sort of thing, you know. Really she's not half bad looking—I'll take a sporting chance myself."

To a suggestion of this nature there was only one answer possible from Big Boy Morgan or his men. The point of Holdbrook's jaw caught the ranchman's hard fist with all the weight of Morgan's body plus the explosive force of his indignation back of it.

The effect was startling. The man's feet left the ground, and he fell with a thud as if dropped from some height.

Morgan whirled to face the others, the fire of his wrath still aflame. "And that goes for every damned man in the outfit if it's needed."

The cowboys murmured angry protests.

Long Jo drawled coldly: "You ain't thinkin' serious as how your oration is exactly called for, be you, Mr. Morgan?"

Instantly, Big Boy was again master of himself. "No, of course not, Jo," he said heartily. "I apologize, boys. I'm some fussed, I guess. Forget it, will you?"

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The responses were as genuine.

"Sure, boss."

"Hit's all right, sir."

"We all feels some that way ourselves."

Then Nora's voice was heard as she called back to Wing Foo from the dining room door. "Thank you kindly, sir, 'tis a good cook you are and a fine old gentleman, but I can't be eating any more to-night, I'm that happy at finding my brother Larry."

"Quick, boys!" said Charlie Gray. "She mustn't see this." He motioned toward the man on the ground who was just beginning to regain consciousness.

With one accord they sprang to Holdbrook's side, and when the Irish girl appeared at the end of the porch, they had the dazed man on a chair and were bending over him, chafing his hands and fanning him with every manifestation of sympathy. But Nora would have had good reason to be startled could she have heard the advice, threats, and warnings that those ministering cowboys whispered in their patient's ear.

"The Lord knows, sir, if I was to eat all that Mr. Chink in there set before me—" she caught sight of Holdbrook and his busy attendants: "Oh, the poor man! What's the matter with him? Can't I be doing something, too?"

"He'll be all right in a minute," said Stub reassuringly. "He's been this way before."

"Poor man, and is it a stroke, do you think?"

"Something like that, miss," said Curly.

"You see, he's subject to these here spells," offered Long Jo.

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"What a pity."

It was Gray who suggested that they take the stricken man to his room where he could be quiet, and Curly, with a crushing grip on Holdbrook's arm, agreed that he would be a "heap safer quiet."

As they were helping the still limp gentleman toward the porch Morgan said: "He'll be all right presently, Miss O'Shea. "But—" he added for Holdbrook's benefit—"he will need to be careful, though, or he will bring on another attack."

Pablo, who had held aloof from the center of activities, thoughtfully rolled a cigarette. "That man he sure goin' to die, Señorita, if he catch much more sickness likea dis."

"What a pity. Do you know I thought there must be something wrong with him the first time I cast my eyes on him. He doesn't look right—poor man—and how kind you all are to him—the saints love you for it."

When they returned from Holdbrook's room, the cowboys, one by one, reluctantly bade her good night and went to the bunk house.

Nora, who had favored each with a smile and a happy word, turned and saw Morgan, who was standing a little apart with his back toward them, gazing moodily off into the night. As she regarded the tall ranchman her glowing face became troubled and she looked at Gray anxiously. "What's the matter with him?" she whispered. "What's he worrying about?"

Gray hesitated then answered: "I rather think he's worried about you."

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"Me? And what's the matter with me?"

"Nothing, nothing at all, I assure you," returned Gray hastily.

Before she could speak again Morgan came toward them. With an air of resolution he began: "I'm sorry, Miss O'Shea."

"Sorry about what, sir?"

"We're a rough lot here."

She smiled: "Sure, sir, and I like the rough kind, if only they be decent. As you may have noticed I did not raise my brother Larry to be a shrinking violet of a man."

"Oh, no, indeed," agreed Morgan hastily, "but, I realize that with your brother away the situation is frightfully awkward for you—I mean you being caught like this at the ranch here."

For a long moment the Irish girl studied Big Boy Morgan's troubled face. Then her sea-gray eyes filled and in a voice that was pitifully broken she said, as she turned away: "You'll be excusing me, sir, I mistook you. I thought I was welcome."

She was moving wearily toward her bundle when Morgan sprang to her side with an eager protest. "No, no—please, Miss O'Shea—you don't understand."

She looked up at him and that radiant smile transformed her countenance. "I'm thinking I don't entirely, sir, but I might if you were just to speak up plain like."

Gray came to Morgan's assistance: "There are only men here at Las Rosas, Miss O'Shea."

For a moment she regarded them gravely, then

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she burst into a merry laugh. "There's no woman at Las Rosas, you say? And me alone with all these fine men? Oh, Lord, I thank thee! 'Tis the chance I've been looking for all my life!"

Charlie Gray laughed as he had not laughed for years.

Morgan cried eagerly: "And you don't mind—you're sure you don't mind, Miss O'Shea?"

"Mind? Sure I'd rather be here than in heaven—the saints forgive me. And why should I not? Are you not all Larry's friends? 'Tis certain sure I am, that my brother's friends are gentlemen, sir. Larry could be friends with no other kind."

"And you will stay with us? You will make Las Rosas your home?"

"And how could I refuse when you look and speak like that? Sure I'll stay and thank you kindly, sir, until Larry comes." She looked smilingly around as she added: "I'm thinking maybe at that there will be some little things I can be doing about the house."

Morgan called for Wing Foo and the old Chinaman appeared on the porch. "Alle lighte Boss Big Bloy, whatee mattee?"

"Wing, Miss O'Shea will occupy my room."

"Oh no, sir," protested Nora. "Please, sir, I could not think of upsetting your household like that, just give me a little corner anywhere at all."

"Boss Big Bloy loom all leady flo missee now. Me flix um. Ol Wing Foo him sabe." He took Nora's bundle and stood ready to show her into the house.

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"You see," smiled Morgan, "Wing knows what is best. It was my mother's room, Miss O'Shea," he added gravely. "Please—I want you to have it. I will take your brother's room."

There was a wondrous light in the sea-gray eyes as she said good night to the two men. To Morgan she added: "And I want you to know, sir, that I'll not close my eyes in sleep till I've said a prayer to the Blessed Virgin for you. 'Tis no wonder at all that Larry loves you."

Big Boy Morgan stood looking after the girl and the Chinaman. When they had disappeared into the house he still stood as if lost in thought.

Charlie Gray, watching him, murmured softly: "If only we had a woman at Las Rosas."

The ranchman started and turned away. "Damn that red-headed, freckled-faced Irish renegade," he said savagely. "I've had about enough, Charlie; I think I'll call it a day." He went toward the bunk house but paused as Wing appeared with his tray and glass.

"Tlme fo egg-nog, Miste Chollie."

"By George, I need it, Wing, thank you." The student, with a whimsical, teasing smile, lifted his glass. "Well Jack, here's to our—ah—shall we say—*un*—happiness?"

"You go to the devil!" retorted Morgan as he disappeared into the bunk house.

But when Charlie Gray had retired and the light in Nora O'Shea's room was out, when the cowboys were sound asleep and Wing Foo was supposed to be,

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Big Boy Morgan stole from the bunk house to the easy chair under the umbrella tree.

For the first time since his mother's death there was a woman at Las Rosas—a woman, the young ranchman said to himself, that his mother would have loved.

Now Jack Morgan normally was far from being repelled by the opposite sex. It could not be said that in his school and college days he avoided the girls. But the truth was he had never experienced even a schoolboy love. Perhaps it was that he loved too well his life and work on the great ranch. Perhaps his mind was too occupied with horses and cattle and men. But never had he met a woman like Nora O'Shea. And the fact that he had seen and admired her through Larry's eyes before she appeared so unexpectedly in the flesh—the very circumstances of their meeting—the situation which had developed with such startling rapidity, all served so to reveal her personality that he felt he had known her always. When a young man feels that a girl is the girl his mother would love and that he has known her always, he is quite likely to sit alone in the night when he should be in his bed asleep.

As noiseless as a ghost Wing Foo crept from the shadows of the house to his young master's side. Squatting on his heels with his back against the trunk of the tree and his hands tucked in the big sleeves of his jacket the old Chinaman talked of the "pletty lady who clome stay Las Losas." How her eyes "alle samee likee ol missees eyes when long tlime go ol Boss Molgan catch um blide, bling um home"; of

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the happiness when "littee Big Bloy clome"; of the old days when the rose garden was in its glory and there were guests at the big ranch and fiestas with music and dancing and laughter. "Alle ttime catch um happness—allee ttime."

And Morgan, living again in the old days, let him talk.

"Mebby so happness clome back now. Mebby so pletty lady bling good ttime," Wing finished plaintively. "Mebby so Big Bloy him catch um blide like fatha. Mebby so Wing Foo see one, two, thlee littee Big Bloy fore ol Chinaman die."

Whereupon Jack Morgan shook himself free from the spell of the past and faced the stern reality of the present. Whatever his plans for Las Rosas might have been, he knew now that they could never be realized. And so, for the second time, but for quite a different reason, he made the solemn assertion that he was a crazy fool and ordered Wing to go to bed.

Wing obeyed—but just the same his "good night, Boss Big Bloy, catch um happness bly and bly" had a hopeful sound, which set Jack Morgan again to dreaming dreams—dreams which he told himself sternly and sadly he had no right to dream.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DAY'S WORK

THE men of Las Rosas were up before the sun. At the first dim hint of dawn the horses were driven from the pasture below the barn to the corrals. In the gray of the early morning the riders fed their mounts. By the time the sun was gilding the highest point of Yellow Jacket Peak breakfast would be over, and the cowboys would again be at the corrals with ropes and saddles making ready for the day's riding.

Big Boy Morgan had said that the work of tallying the Las Rosas cattle must be finished by July first. The men did not know why the young ranchman was tallying his cattle. Even Long Jo did not know. And there was much talk about the matter when the boss was not around. But whatever his reasons for counting his cattle, Big Boy Morgan could depend upon the unusual work being finished in the specified time, even—as Maricopa Bill put it—if they had to ride the hoofs off every horse in the outfit.

The noise made by the men at the wash basins and pump awakened the girl in Morgan's room. At first she wondered what the sounds meant. It was barely light enough for her to see, but through

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the open window came the voices of the ranch announcing the morning. Bulls bellowed in heavy, rumbling tones or lifted their voices in long-drawn calls; cows lowed; calves bawled; roosters crowed; turkeys gobbled; horses neighed; doves cooed; and in the umbrella tree birds twittered and trilled and chirped their greetings to the new day. Then she heard the men trooping into the house and understood.

"But surely," she said sleepily to herself, "Mr. Morgan would never be having his breakfast at this early hour." With a contented smile she was turning luxuriously for another nap when she distinctly heard Big Boy's voice. The Irish girl slept no more that morning.

Dreamily she recalled all that Larry had written her about the ranchman from the time of his meeting with Morgan in Philadelphia. In the enthusiasm of his first acquaintance with the man from Arizona, and in the excitement of his introduction to the West, where, as he believed, his hope for riches would be so easily realized, Nora's brother had been extravagant in praise of the master of Las Rosas. Upon this extravagance and upon her belief that it was Morgan who gave Larry the considerable sum of money which he had sent to her just before their mother's death, the girl had formed her conception of this American gentleman. And now, at last, after the long waiting, after her weary journey alone, her disappointment and fears for Larry and her terror when she believed herself lost in that strange wild land, she had met him face to face-

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She had heard his voice. He had proven his kindness. And, wonder of wonders, she was here in his room.

Sitting on the edge of the bed she looked reverently at the various pieces of furniture—strong, substantial furniture with a feeling of quality and genuineness that was like the man himself. Here and there, there were things that Wing Foo had neglected to move—intimate man-things—a pipe and tobacco jar, a fancy silver-mounted bridle, new riding boots, a pair of spurs. In one corner there was an old-fashioned secretaire with the shelves behind its glass doors crowded with books and magazines. On the wall were two photographs, framed. Quickly the girl crossed the room for a closer look at the photographs. It was not difficult to identify them—his father and mother. And this had been his mother's room. It was in this very room, no doubt, that her boy was born. It was here that she taught him, day by day, many of the things with which a mother helps her man child to build his manhood. It was here, too, that she closed her eyes in that last, long sleep. Standing on tip-toe the Irish girl impulsively touched her fresh young lips to the old photograph of the mother. But when she turned as if to pay the same tribute to the companion picture, she stopped suddenly and her cheeks grew rosy. Big Boy Morgan was the image of his father.

Morgan and his cowboys, that morning, were not so engrossed in roping and saddling their horses that they failed to see the girl when she appeared at

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the corral. She had climbed into an old farm wagon which was standing outside the enclosure, close to the stockade fence, and from that safe elevation was viewing the, to her, exciting and dangerous activities of her new-found friends.

In the midst of the band of restless horses the men moved calmly, selecting their mounts. The wary animals, accustomed to the game, were quick to know the ones wanted, and those chosen made every effort to escape—crowding behind their more fortunate comrades, rushing madly here and there, whirling, plunging, dodging. To the confusion of the swiftly-moving forms and tossing heads and flying manes and tails was added the rolling thunder of those trampling hoofs. But for each animal selected the inevitable moment soon came. A cowboy swung his arm, the loop of a riata flew through the air and the captured horse, in most cases, submitting gracefully, was led to the waiting bridle and saddle.

To the Irish girl it was a thrilling scene. And this, she thought with a glow of pride, was Larry's work—for, of course, she saw her boy the equal, at least, of any of the Las Rosas riders. How was she to know that Larry rode only the gentlest of the horses—staid old animals that would stand to be bridled—and that with a riata the boy could do nothing at all.

But the cowboys, while keenly alive to the girl who was watching them with such interest, paid her no attention beyond the barest acknowledgments of her presence. Big Boy had already made them aware that he was in no mood for trifling.

Grim and silent, the master of Las Rosas caught and saddled his own mount, and apparently did not even see his young woman guest. When every man had his horse, the gate to the pasture was opened and the remaining animals freed. And then, presently, they were all mounted and ready for the long day in the saddle. As they rode out of the corral and passed the girl in the wagon each in turn was favored with a smile and a happy word, and for the first time that morning the riders exhibited a degree of cheerfulness. It may be said, too, that as they passed in review before the Irish girl the horses for some reason exhibited a sudden excess of good spirits which forced the cowboys to demonstrate their horsemanship in a way fully to merit the admiration which shone in her frank and expressive countenance. Big Boy Morgan, who was last to leave the corral, reined his horse up to the wagon.

"You are up early," he said gravely, removing his broad-brimmed hat. "I am sorry if we disturbed you."

The girl's radiant face grew serious as she marked his manner. "Indeed, sir," she said, "'tis me that's been getting up with the sun every day since I can remember. 'Tis a shame for me not being ready for breakfast, but you see, sir, I did not know."

"Oh, but you must not think of rising for our breakfast hour," he returned with a kindly smile. "Wing Foo will serve you whenever you are ready."

"Thank you, sir, 'tis good of you to be that thoughtful." She spoke quietly but in her eyes

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there was a look which led Big Boy to say impulsively: "Look here, Miss O'Shea, I know I must seem a poor sort of a host, but I want you to know that we are all as glad as we can be to have you at Las Rosas. I wish I wasn't so busy right now. I don't like to seem inhospitable, but I have some work that must be finished on a certain date, and I dare not lose even an hour. Please, won't you believe how happy I am to have you here, and won't you just make yourself at home as if—as if you had always been here?"

"Indeed, sir, there's no doubt at all in my mind that I'm welcome. How could there be after last night? But—"

"But what, Miss O'Shea?"

"You'll forgive me for saying so, but for a man who has everything in the world that should make a man happy, you're that doleful I could cry just from looking at you."

He laughed at this—a quick, reckless laugh that was honestly meant to deceive her but did not in the least. "Really I must go now," he said. "Just ask Wing for anything you want. Charlie Gray will be around. Don't worry about Larry. Don't get lonesome. Good-by." At a touch of the spur his horse leaped away.

From the wagon she watched him until he passed from sight over the crest of a hill. Then she climbed slowly down and went thoughtfully to the house where she found that Wing Foo had set a table for her on the veranda overlooking the neglected rose garden.

"Ol missee she likee bleakfas alle samee me fix

um fo you," the Chinaman explained as he seated Nora in the chair which for years had been used by the mistress of Las Rosas, and the table was placed, the service arranged, exactly as she had taught him. "You want um likee this, too?" He waited anxiously for the girl's approval.

"Sure and 'tis a wonderful thing, and past my grandest dreams—to be eating like this with the sunshine and the birds and the flowers."

"Hah," cried the delighted Wing Foo, "me sabe, you alle samee ol missee, long ttime go she young missee alle samee you. She laugh, laugh, alle samee you—pletty white teeth—cheek likee lose—eyes shine alle samee you; likee buttlety—likee sun—likee flowe—alle ttime catch um happness fo evlybody." He pointed to the garden and the tangle of vines on the broken trellisses. "Alle ttime she make um loses, loses, evlywhere."

Nora looked at the untrimmed bushes and the rank weeds that now held possession of the yard. "And why does no one make the roses now, I wonder?" she said half to herself.

"Ah-h-h, nobody got ttime catch um loses now. Boss Big Bloy him alle ttime lanch wolk—hosses, cows—alle ttime go Tucson. No catch um happness any mo. You come stay Las Losas, that mo bettee. Mebby so bly an bly Boss Big Bloy catch um happness. Ol Wing Foo, him sabe."

The old Chinaman shuffled away to his kitchen. Charlie Gray coming from the house at that moment observed the color in the Irish girl's cheeks but greeted her with perfunctory indifference.

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When she invited him to sit down he answered in a tone which expressed extreme discontent: "No thank you, I had breakfast with Morgan. It's a beastly hour, but it seems hardly fair to let him eat alone." He turned away and stood looking gloomily at the distant hills and mountains.

Charlie Gray was very low in spirits that morning. He had been fairly well taken out of himself by the events of the evening before but after an uneasy night had come to look upon the situation from his habitual viewpoint. He reminded himself that he was at Las Rosas under the doctor's orders. His health, he told himself, demanded absolute rest and quiet. Foreseeing all kinds of unrest as a result of this Irish girl's presence, he more ardently than ever wished himself anywhere but in Arizona. If it were not for the feeling that his friend Morgan needed him, he would take himself off without an hour's delay to some more attractive place. And that was his real grievance. Much as Charlie Gray desired to think only of himself and his own ills, his loyalty to his friend was always compelling him, against his will, to neglect himself and what he conceived to be his own best interests, just as the really human heart of the man was constantly upsetting the solemn mental habits of the student.

Nora O'Shea was watching him with an odd little smile, as if while she sympathized with him she was amused at his peevishness.

"I suppose I should introduce myself," he said after a long silence. "As I remember, that formality was overlooked in the excitement of your

arrival last evening. I am Charles Madison Gray of Philadelphia. Old friend of Morgan's. Doctor sent me out here for a rest."

"Philadelphia?" she cried. "Oh, sir, Mr. Gray, and did you know my brother Larry?"

In spite of himself the man responded to her eager animation: "No," he said with a degree of cheerfulness, "I had not the pleasure of your brother's acquaintance in Philadelphia. I met him here though, when I first came, shortly before he—ah—left for the south on business for Mr. Morgan. Your brother is a remarkable man, Miss O'Shea."

Her radiant face rewarded him. "Oh, but 'tis a wonderful thing, sir, for Larry boy to be having such friends as you and Mr. Morgan. To hear you speaking so well of him makes me that happy I could cry with joy—but don't be afraid, sir, I will not." As she smiled through her tears Charlie Gray mentally threw up his hands.

"The doctor sent you here, you say?" she continued.

"But that is too bad now, isn't it—though 'tis a fine thing for Mr. Morgan. I can see that 'tis good for him just having you around. And the poor gentleman who was taken so quick last night—how is he feeling this morning?"

Gray smothered a desire to laugh. "Holdbrook? Oh, he is all right, there is nothing serious the matter with him—that is—I mean—"

"Oh!" her tone was so expressive that he glanced at her sharply. But her face was grave as she asked: "And is Mr. Holdbrook here for his health, too?"

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Charlie Gray was floundering desperately, trying to keep from saying that he too would like to know why Jim Holdbrook was at Las Rosas when a clatter of fast-flying hoofs drew their attention. Curly was riding over the hill toward the house as fast as his horse could run. Without dismounting he opened the big gate and a moment later dashed wildly across the yard and leaped from his horse at the gate in the picket fence.

Nora rose to her feet, her eyes wide with anxiety. Charlie Gray, as the cowboy came to the veranda, went quickly forward in a manner very unlike his usual languid, disinterested air. "What's the matter, Curly?" he said sharply.

The rider grinned sheepishly. "I done forgot my rope, Mr. Gray, an' had to come back for it." He removed his big hat and bowed with elaborate politeness to Nora. "Bein' as I was here I figured I might as well get me a good drink at the house pump. Water at the corral is good enough generally but I ain't been a feelin' jest right lately an' I reckon mebby I'd better try a change fer a while. How be you this mornin', ma'am?"

The girl sank into her chair with a sigh of relief. "I'm very well, thank you kindly, sir."

The cowboy, seating himself on the edge of the veranda, gazed up at her with a look which caused Gray to become suddenly interested in a poor little rosebud that was trying hard to bloom on a neglected bush at the far corner of the house.

"They call me Curly, ma'am."

She acknowledged the introduction with a smile.

"Ah-h-h, what mattee you, Cully?" cried Wing Foo wrathfully from the doorway. "Bettee you go wolk. Cowbloy no come house when missee eat. Boss Big Bloy him catchee you, him laise hell."

"Never mind him, ma'am," said the rider darkly. "There's goin' to be a Chink funeral around these parts some o' these days. I'm that gentle an' easy-gaited there's some thinks I ain't got a kick nor a buck in me, but they're due to learn diff'rent if they spur me too hard. That thar brother a your'n, he's the only man in the whole blamed outfit that really appreciates me. He's sure one fine man, is Larry, ma'am."

The cowboy glanced appealingly over his shoulder at Gray, who responded nobly with: "Larry thinks a lot of you, Curly. You two are great friends."

The rider's grin of grateful comradeship gave the student an odd thrill.

The girl's face was transfigured with happiness and pride. "Indeed, and my Larry was always an understanding boy. I know well that he would be great friends with a man like yourself. 'Twas me that taught him to be always so careful of his company."

"Yes, ma'am, you see it's like this: Everybody on this here ranch is that short spoken an' always on the prod—exceptin' Mr. Gray here, of course—that an even-tempered, easy-dispositioned feller, same as me, is just naturally bound to get lonesomer than a mournin' dove in a flock o' buzzards. Even the boss ain't like himself no more. Take this mornin' for instance—he's plumb inhuman. An' Long Jo—

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why, ma'am, the way he rawhided me just because I forgot my rope was somethin' scandalous. I couldn't near 'a' stood 'em these last three months if it hadn't a been your brother an' me was such close pardners. As it is, I was plumb decidin' only yesterday, to quit an' let the whole blamed outfit go to blazes—but now—well I reckon I'll just stay on fer a spell longer, now."

"I'm thinking Mr. Morgan would be sorry to have you go."

"I'd sure be missed, all right," he admitted modestly with another look at Gray who was struggling manfully to control his features. "Why, miss, the last word Larry said when he was a leavin' on that trip for Mr. Morgan was how he wished I was goin' with him. 'It'll be mighty lonesome without you, pard,' he says, says he. But shucks, Big Boy he wouldn't near hear to Larry an' me both goin' away from the ranch at the same time."

"Which is easy to understand," Nora agreed joyfully.

"Indeed, yes," murmured Gray.

Whereupon the cowboy, made bold by Gray's approval and encouraged by Nora's appreciation, played his next card with an air of assurance which filled the student's soul with delight and caused the Irish girl's eyes to shine with suppressed merriment.

"Look a here, ma'am, you'll be a wantin' t' ride, of course. Was you ever on a horse?"

"Never in my life, sir."

"That's all right. I'll learn you. You might take a notion to go a-ridin' with some feller."

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"I can't say, sir, I never did, and those beasts that I saw this morning didn't behave like they'd ever been accustomed much to women."

"Oh, ma'am! You ain't supposin' that I'd let *you* git on any horse that was even a-thinkin' o' bein' bad! Why, it was me that learned your brother how to ride!"

"You did? Ah, but 'tis a kind gentleman you are. And tell me now, is Larry boy good on a horse? Can he ride like the rest of you?"

The cowboy drew a long breath as he shot a glance of triumph toward Gray. "Can Larry O'Shea ride? Well, I should hope to die he can. Why, ma'am, that brother o' yours can ride anything that looks like a horse. Do you remember, Mr. Gray, that day we all got us that rarin', buckin', corkscrewin', sunfishin', outlawed bronc what piled every man in the outfit as easy as Wing Foo can flip a hot cake? Pablo, too, ma'am, and Pablo he won the championship last year, at that. Well, ma'am, Larry he jest set there on the corral fence a-lookin' at us old timers gettin' throwed around 'til there wasn't any more of us left; then he climbs down and walks easy like over to that fightin' fool of a horse, and 'fore we could bat an eye he's up in the middle of him an' a-sittin' as pretty as you are in that there chair. Ride! Why, ma'am, Larry rode that outlaw to a whisper without ever turning a hair himself. Rode him proper, too—a-scratchin' him on the shoulder and flanks every jump an' all the time a-smilin' calm an' peaceful like a angel an' not even once a-pullin' leather, either. You wait till you see

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him—finest figger of a man on a horse I've ever seen, an' I seen *some*. I'd sure be mighty proud, ma'am, if you'd let me learn you, like I learned your brother Larry."

It is impossible to say what daring heights the cowboy might have attained under the spell of Nora's smiling delight had Wing Foo not again reminded the rider that he was not employed to sit on the ranch house veranda and entertain Mr. Morgan's guests.

"You can see how it is here, ma'am," said Curly as he started for his horse, "even the Chink is plumb set on takin' the joy out o' life. But just you wait; I'm good-natured and easy-goin', like I say, but some bright mornin' there's goin' to be pieces o' Chinaman scattered all over this end of Arizona."

Nora was watching the cowboy as he rode away, and Gray observing the Irish girl's face was wondering just what impression Curly had made, when she met the student's gaze with an unmistakable, knowing look. "'Tis a great blessing to have a fine imagination, now isn't it, sir?" she said gravely. As Gray laughed, she added: "If only a man don't be spending the strength of it all on himself."

The man of books flushed. Had she meant the shot for him? He could not be sure, but whether she meant it or not, he was forced to admit the hit. He left her soon after that, upon the pretext that he must write letters.

Later in the forenoon Holdbrook appeared and endeavored to make himself very agreeable with the evident purpose of enjoying the Irish girl's company. But he did not remain long. Her innocent inquiries

—if he had recovered from his attack and was it his heart—and her sympathetic story of how she knew a man once who dropped like he was hit, proved too much for him and he disappeared for the day. Gray joined her at lunch but was preoccupied and silent and as soon as the meal was finished retired again to his room. When, unaccustomed to such idleness, she insisted on helping Wing in the kitchen the Chinaman compromised by bringing out some of Morgan's things that needed mending.

As the girl sat with her grateful task under the umbrella tree in the vast quiet of that afternoon her thoughts were as active as her busy needle. She believed implicitly in the kindness of her new-found friends. She did not question their explanation of her brother's absence. She did not too much credit Curly's complaints. But something—she could not say what it was—disturbed her with the feeling that all was not as well at Las Rosas as it appeared on the surface. Again and again, her mind returned to Big Boy Morgan as she had seen him at the corral that morning. Again and again, she assured herself that the master of Las Rosas, in his gentle consideration, his thoughtfulness for her, his sympathy, his strength, in his looks, even, was all that she had imagined him to be. And yet there was something—something that caused her heart to go out to him in a great pity. She was conscious of an intense longing to help him. What had Wing Foo meant when he said that his "Boss Big Bloy no catch um happness any mo?" How much had Curly exaggerated his statement that the boss was

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not like himself? Why was Mr. Gray so pre-occupied and troubled? What was the reason for Holdbrook's evident ill humor and discontent?

The girl's thoughts were interrupted by the arrival of Stub and Maricopa Bill. Riding up to the fence and leaving their tired horses, the cowboys went to the pump near the kitchen door—that is, Bill went to the pump, but Stub stopped under the umbrella tree. Nora received him with her ready smile and the rider, throwing aside his hat and squatting on his heels with his back to the tree trunk, returned her greeting with a grin of admiration.

Gray, drawn by the sound of the galloping hoofs, came from the house, and Stub—with his eyes on Nora—answered the student's inquiry: "The others 'll be along with a bunch of cattle directly. Me an' Bill hopped on ahead to put what's in the pasture down yonder out before they get here. I just stopped for a drink. Water at the corral don't appear to be agreein' with me lately. How are you enjoyin' yourself, miss?"

He was gazing at the girl so intently that he did not see the laughter in Gray's face.

Nora answered demurely: "I'm doing very well, thank you. 'Tis nice to be so peaceful and quiet like after my long time on the steamer and the trains."

The cowboy heaved a sigh. "Las Rosas ain't what it was before your brother went away. I sure miss him a lot. You see Larry an' me, we was great friends. Fact, he was the only man in the whole outfit that really knows me. Everybody else is so

darned sulky like or something, an' I'm so naturally good-natured and jolly that Larry he took to me first thing. Men like your brother an' me are bound to be lonesome with an outfit like this, and so we got to be mighty close. Last word Larry said when he was leaving was: 'I wish to God you was going along, pard. I sure hate to leave you alone here—don't know how I'll get along without you.' But, of course, Morgan, he couldn't near spare us both at the same time—and so you see, miss, I just had to stay."

The Irish girl's face beamed with her appreciation. "'Tis easy to understand how Mr. Morgan could not spare a man like you. And 'tis sure I am that you and Larry would be great friends. He could not help it."

Stub stole a look at Gray and upon receiving a reassuring smile continued: "Yes, ma'am, Las Rosas is sure nothin' like what it used to be. I'd just about made up my mind to quit and let Morgan and his ranch go to thunder. But I reckon I'll stay on a spell longer *now*. Ain't there nothin' I can do for you, miss? I'd sure admire to. Maybe you'd like to learn to throw a rope?"

Gray laughed.

"Well," demanded Stub, "and what's funny about that? It's a mighty handy thing, to know how to handle a riata. You never can tell when you're going to need it. She might want to rope her a man," he finished slyly. "Don't you mind Mr. Gray, miss," he continued seriously. "I can show you, just like I showed your brother Larry."

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"And is Larry good with a rope—can he throw it over the head of a beast the same as I watched you doing this morning?"

"Can Larry throw a—! Did you hear that, Bill?" He appealed to the grizzled old cowboy who was now standing awkwardly at the other side of Nora's chair. "Why, miss, your brother is the best hand with a rope in the whole Southwest, ain't he Bill?"

"You bet yer life."

"Can Larry catch a horse, huh? That's a good one! I give you my word, miss, I've seen that boy do what no other puncher in the outfit would even think of trying—I seen Larry, many a time, catch three and four horses at once. Ain't that the truth, Bill?"

"You bet yer life."

Nora exclaimed with delight: "'Tis certain I am that my boy would do well anything that he started. With a man like you to teach him, he could not help being a wonder."

"You find the water here at the house pump much more healthful than that at the corrals, don't you, Bill?" Gray asked earnestly, in his best student manner.

"You bet yer life."

The girl smiled on him. "And what will you be teaching me, Mr. Bill?"

Maricopa Bill shuffled his feet and fingered his hat nervously. "Why, I don't know, lady, I'd sure be glad to help. I'm best with a six gun, I reckon."

"Good!" cried Charlie Gray. "She might want to shoot her a man."

"There's plenty of men what needs shootin,'" retorted Stub savagely.

Bill grinned.

"And is my brother Larry good with a gun, too?" asked Nora innocently.

"You bet yer life," said Bill. "It was me larned him, and I'm a tellin' you, lady, that kid can shoot the eyebrows offen a mosquiter. An' quick on the draw—why I've seed him—"

A yell interrupted Bill's testimony as to the prowess of Nora O'Shea's brother. The startled group under the umbrella tree looked up to see Long Jo at the big gate and, just coming over the hill, the leaders of a great herd of cattle.

The two cowboys, without a parting word, leaped the fence and before the Irish girl could catch her breath were in their saddles riding like mad.

From the veranda overlooking the old rose garden and the little valley the Irish girl and the student watched the Las Rosas men at their work in the field below the house.

Stub and Maricopa Bill, with shrill cowboy yells, dashed wildly here and there, moving the few cattle already on the ground to another pasture, while the big herd with the other riders were streaming down the hill. As Curly and Bill drove the last animal through the gate on the far side of the field Long Jo opened the gate toward the house and rode through followed by the herd. And then while the cattle were held in a compact band by the cowboys, Mor-

gan and Long Jo rode among the crowding, jostling creatures. Now and then one, more venturesome or more unruly than the others, would make a quick dash for freedom, and a horse and rider would spring with startling swiftness into action—running, leaping, whirling, here and there, with what seemed a mad reckless fury, until the baffled animal was turned back into the herd. From the thousands of trampling hoofs the dust lifted in a yellow cloud which the long, slanting rays of the afternoon sun transformed into a cloud of golden light in which the constantly shifting forms of cattle, horses, and riders appeared and vanished only to reappear and dissolve again in a never-ending variety of group arrangements.

Nora O'Shea exclaimed with wonder and delight. Her eyes danced with excitement, her face was flushed with color, her eager voice was charged with enthusiasm as she asked question after question of the grave student at her side. And Charlie Gray, watching the Irish girl, felt, in spite of himself, the thrill which animated her.

Immersed in his own bookish pursuits this friend of Morgan's had looked upon the life at Las Rosas with a bored indifference. He had no interest in the dirty, smelly, noisy, disgusting work. Cattle were horned beasts, half wild, sometimes dangerous, and always stupid creatures. Horses and riding he abhorred. The cowboys, he liked—accepting his own superiority as one accepts a mountain or the sea and, therefore, feeling no need to be constantly calling attention to it. By the assiduous

contemplation of his own ills he had so magnified his trouble that there was little room for other interests. But at heart the man was sound—the kernel was good, though the shell was hard. And so the wholesome, wholesouled enthusiasm of the Irish girl for all this that was so new and strange to her broke down his indifference and forced the man of books to see a little through her eyes, while her beautiful motherly way of viewing everything in its relation to her “Larry boy” warmed his student heart to something more than an intellectual consideration of the things she helped him to see. With this, her amazing capacity for happiness, which enabled her to find the joy of life as a bee finds honey in thistle blossoms, made him ashamed of yielding so readily to his own, more than half fancied, troubles.

Gray was answering the girl's eager questions when Wing Foo, coming from the house, interrupted the student's explanation of the scene, with: “Tlme fo egg-nog, Miste Chollie.”

Nora looked curiously from the glass on the Chinaman's tray to Gray's face.

“You see, Miss O'Shea,” the man of books continued, “the cattle are all marked with the brands of the different owners who have stock on the open range. And so Morgan, in order to tally—that is count—his—”

“Tlake um egg-nog, Miste Chollie.”

Gray turned impatiently. “I don't want any more of that stuff, Wing. Take it away.”

The girl and the Chinaman exchanged knowing smiles.

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"Ah-h-h, me sabe, Miste Chollie, him no likee egg-nog now. Catch um pletty lady—that mo bettee. Alle lightee." With a shrill, cackling laugh he disappeared.

Gray colored and the girl laughed at his confusion, though her own cheeks were red.

Presently, in answer to one of her characteristic expressions of admiration for the horsemanship of the cowboys, he said: "I suppose you will be riding with them before the week is past."

She caught her breath with a gasp of delight. "Oh, sir, and do you think I could ever stick on a horse at all?"

"Why not?" he smiled. "Everybody in this country rides—women, girls, children."

"Oh, but you're joking with me?"

"Indeed, no, there's no reason in the world why you should not ride if you wish."

She gave him one of those looks which made him feel that she saw much deeper than the surface of things. "And why don't you have a horse yourself?"

The color came into his pale cheeks again as he answered: "Oh, I used to ride with Morgan when we were boys, and I visited here with my father. I haven't seemed to care for it much this time though."

She regarded him with a teasing smile. "Mr. Curly said he would teach me."

"I don't think you would have any difficulty finding teachers," he retorted.

Her laughing glance was a challenge. "And Mr.

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Holdbrook was kind enough to invite me to go with him."

"Holdbrook! And did you accept?"

"Not entirely. I thought I'd better just wait a bit, do you see?"

The man of books surrendered. "Will you ride with me?"

She laughed merrily: "Thank you kindly, sir. I will be happy to do so—if," she added with mocking seriousness, "if you are sure such a frivolous occupation will not interfere with your pursuit of ill health."

It may be remarked that the Philadelphian's shell of scholarly aloofness was at least cracked.

Charlie Gray observed a marked change in the atmosphere of Las Rosas that evening when the men came in from their day's work. The Irish girl's charm, which had worked such a wholesome transformation in the little world of the tourist car, brought a new spirit into the world of the Las Rosas men. The riders, as they came from the corral, were laughing and talking like a band of happy children. They exchanged hearty greetings and merry jests with Gray and Nora, shouted joyously to Wing Foo, and even—with some reserve—acknowledged the presence of Holdbrook. Morgan, too, Gray thought, seemed in better spirits as though—temporarily, at least—the gloom of his trouble was banished by the glow of her happiness.

When the evening meal was over, and they were all assembled under the umbrella tree, on the

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veranda and in front of the bunk house, the cowboys called for Pablo to bring his guitar. A light breath of air rippled over the sea of grassy hills, stirred the leaves of the cottonwood in the valley meadows, and softly touched the rose bushes in the old garden, as if with a good-night caress. The dusk of twilight deepened. The voices of the ranch were hushed. Above the mountains in the west, where Yellow Jacket Peak lifted out of the shadows into the sky, the evening star shone in the faint afterglow of the departed sun. Softly, sweetly the tones of the guitar floated away into the night. And to each one—to the girl who had come so far across the seas to be with her beloved brother, to Morgan with his memories of his Las Rosas childhood and with all that those surroundings meant to him, to Gray and Holdbrook and the cowboys—the music said a different thing.

It was Charlie Gray who asked Nora to sing.

"Oh, sir, but I don't know a thing save some old Irish songs my mother taught me when I was a wee slip of a girl."

The men were insistent.

"And how can you be expecting Mr. Pablo there to play a thing he has never even heard?" she demanded.

"If la Señorita will sing a little, mebbly so I can," the vaquero offered modestly. "I don't know—me, I will try."

So she hummed a simple melody which Pablo quickly caught and then she sang. Rich and full, with marvelous sweetness and purity of tone her

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voice rose and fell to the accompaniment of the guitar. The genuineness of their appreciation touched her heart, and she continued to sing for them, song after song, with a joyous giving of herself in the music as if she were pouring out for them with lavish abandon all the wealth of her soul. And some of her songs were gay with laughter and the sound of dancing feet; and some were filled with sadness and the pain of aching hearts; and some were bold and brave with promises; and some were filled with tears; and in all there was love.

The men sat very still.

And no one heard a horseman who rode quietly up on the far side of the corrals behind the barn. With the building between himself and the house the man dismounted and leaving his horse, crept along outside the fence nearly to the big gate. For some time the dark form, shadowy and indistinct in the night, remained motionless, listening to the Irish girl singing her Irish songs. Then suddenly, as one overcome by his emotions, the unseen listener threw himself on the ground where he lay prone, his face buried in his arms to smother the sobs he could not control.

CHAPTER IX

SARCO

IN spite of her host's kindly protests and Wing Foo's quaint arguments, Nora had insisted, after that first morning, on having her breakfast with the others.

"All my life," she said, "I have been getting up before breakfast, so why should I lie abed now? Indeed, it doesn't seem right at all for me not to be cooking it for the rest of you, besides feeding the pig and maybe working a bit in the garden or doing the wash or something useful just to give me an appetite."

On this particular morning the young ranchman was alone in the dining-room when the girl, with her arms full of roses, appeared.

"Look," she cried joyously, as she held out the blossoms for his admiration, "Wing told me I might gather them. 'Tis an amazing thing how they bloom in spite of—" she saw Morgan's face and faltered.

"In spite of my neglect," he said grimly. "Don't mind me, Miss O'Shea."

She looked at him frankly—too honest to deny her thought. "And what a pity 'tis," she said softly, "that your mother's garden should get in such a

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state—even if you have no fondness for flowers yourself—which I don't believe."

Big Boy Morgan hung his head. "You are right, Miss O'Shea," he said at last. "I do care for flowers. That garden out there—" he paused because he could not go on.

Together they turned and stood looking into the weed-grown yard.

At last, with an effort, he said: "The ranch takes its name from the garden, you know—El Rancho de Las Rosas—The ranch of the roses—or simply Las Rosas—the roses."

She spoke softly: "I wonder would you mind, sir, if I was to fix the old place up a bit? It would be a real kindness for you to let me because you see I am not used to playing the lady with nothing at all to do."

"Go as far as you like," he returned. "I'll give you a couple of men to help."

"No, no," she answered quickly. "I want no help—if you please, I'd much rather do it all by myself."

There was a peculiar expression on his boyish face as he answered: "That's what mother used to say—she never would let any one touch her roses."

"I know," she answered, "'twas Wing that told me how she loved them and tended them with her own hands—as I can easily understand how she would."

"But if you should find it too big a job will you tell me?"

"Indeed, sir, if I find that I'm needing any one to

help I'll just be asking Mr. Gray," she returned. "'Twill be good for his health, I'm thinking." The look with which she accompanied her words was illuminating.

Morgan smiled. "By George! I believe you can do it."

"Do what?" she asked innocently.

"Get Charlie Gray away from his books and interested in something beside himself," he answered bluntly. "That's all in the world he needs."

"Well," she returned demurely, "I'm thinking that's all most of us need—one way or another." And with that she left him standing there while she arranged her roses in the vase which the Chinaman brought.

Gray and Holdbrook came in a moment later.

With Nora presiding at the table, the three men always attempted a decent show of cheerfulness, while the Irish girl, though she invariably felt the forbidding presence of the spirit that sat with them, did what she could to lighten the gloom. Breakfast, this morning—perhaps because of the roses—was even more depressing than usual.

Charlie Gray, aroused by Nora's spirit and touched by his friend Morgan's evident unhappiness, did his best. Holdbrook, under the spell of her charm, was as unlike himself as it was possible for him to be. But Big Boy Morgan, characteristically unable to continue for long the pretense, sat in a moody silence which to any one less discerning than Nora O'Shea would have been inexcusably rude. Then Holdbrook with devilish diplomacy began taking advan-

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tage of the situation to exhibit his host in the worst possible light while magnifying his own assumed spirit of kindly sympathy for the girl. Whereupon Gray in his effort to defend Morgan revealed more clearly his own dislike for Holdbrook. And finally Morgan, with no attempt even at an apology, rose abruptly and left the room.

Nora's eyes followed him wistfully. Holdbrook laughed. Gray was silent. But when Holdbrook attempted a diplomatic excuse for their host's manner the girl said quietly but with pointed meaning: "My father used often to say, sir, that an unnecessary explanation was an impertinence. Don't you think it would be best if we were just to assume that Mr. Morgan has some good reason to be troubled and let it go at that?"

It was an hour or more later. Morgan had ridden away with his cowboys without again coming to the house. Nora was in her room—Morgan's room. The girl was trying bravely to dismiss the unpleasant breakfast scene from her mind, but the depressing effect of her host's manner persisted. Had she offended him by her interest in his mother's neglected rose garden? Could it be that in spite of his repeated assurances she was not welcome in his home? If the ranchman's welcome was not sincere she could not stay, of course, but where would she go? What would she do? If only Larry had gotten her letter before he went away. If only he would come soon.

Her thoughts were interrupted by Wing Foo, who called to her: "Missee Nola, Missee Nola, clome see."

As the girl joined the old Chinaman and Charlie

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Gray on the veranda, Wing pointed excitedly toward Pablo, who was leading two horses toward the house. "Lookee—lookee, Pablo flix um Sarco hoss fo Missee Nola lide!"

Gray smiled at her bewildered air. "Come, this is an occasion," he said, and led her to the gate.

Wing Foo disappeared again into the house.

The old horse had been groomed until his white coat was like satin, and his mane and tail were like spun silver, and in spite of his years he moved with a grace and spirit which seemed to imply that he, too, realized that, as Gray had said, this was an occasion.

The vaquero, his face beaming with pleasure and his dark eyes shining with excitement, led the pride of Las Rosas up to the girl. With sombrero in hand he bowed low. "Señorita, dis ees Sarco. I bring him to you. He ees the mos' wonderful horse in all dis country. It ees so, as everybody knows." He turned and addressed the horse: "Sarco, you come speak to la Señorita good morning. La Señorita, she ees now to be your boss and you are to be always for her—jus' for her, Sarco, like in the old time you was only for la Señora Morgan. It ees as I tell you in the corral—come."

Obediently, but with the dignity that was fitting to his rank, the beautiful animal stepped forward and extended a soft muzzle toward the wondering girl.

With a little cry of delight she met the gentle creature's advance with extended hand. "I do

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believe he understands," she whispered. "Sure and he's offering to be friends with me."

"*Si*, Sarco he understand'. Me, I tell him all about la Señorita who make everybody so happy," returned the triumphant Pablo. "Sarco, he know. He ees one damn smart horse, you bet."

"I'm thinking 'tis myself that doesn't understand," said Nora looking at Gray doubtfully.

"I told Mr. Morgan you wished to ride," Gray returned smiling.

"Sure," cried Pablo, "it ees like dis, Señorita: Señor Morgan he tell me, 'Pablo, it ees for you to stay at the corral for a little dis morning and make ready a horse for la Señorita who will wish to ride.' '*Si*, Señor,' I say, 'there ees that Pedro horse, he ees nice gentle horse for lady.' The boss, he look at me straight an' he say, 'no, Pablo, that Pedro horse ees not for la Señorita—Sarco, he ees the only horse for her. As long as la Señorita ees stay at Las Rosas, Sarco shall be her horse.' Me, I was near dropped at his word. By damn, never was such a thing before. Sarco was all the time only for the mother and never since she die has there been one to ride him. If any one put a saddle on Sarco Señor Morgan kill, I think—until this morning. An' then what you think—the boss he bring with his own hand his mother's bridle an' saddle—look!" He turned and placed his hand reverently on the saddle. "I think, Señorita," he added gravely to Nora, "the stirrups they are pretty near jus' right for you—you are of the same—what you call—tall like the Señora. Dis saddle it have not been

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touched since the las' time she ride. Me, I made Sarco ready for her that las' time myself." He bowed his head.

Then indeed the girl knew that she was welcome at Las Rosas. With a little cry she threw her arms about the horse's neck and with her face in his silvery mane murmured words of Irish endearment which neither Pablo nor Gray could quite understand.

The Mexican whispered softly: "By damn, Señor Gray, the boss he mus' pretty quick love the Señorita like hell to give to her his mother's Sarco horse with the saddle an' all like dis—what you think, heh?"

Charlie Gray shook his head doubtfully, but there was a light in his eyes which told that the student was very far from thinking of himself at that moment.

When Nora returned to her room to prepare for the ride she received another surprise. A costume, complete from boots to hat, was laid out on the bed ready for her. When Wing Foo appeared in answer to her excited call the old Chinaman's face was so wrinkled in a golden smile that his eyes were only visible as two points of light.

"And what magic is this, Wing?" she demanded pointing to the things on the bed. "Is it a fairy you are, in disguise?"

"Me no sabe faily—me catch um clos—you likee?"

"Sure man and you've saved my life—I'd have died entirely trying to get on that horse dressed like I am."

The old servant laughed. "Boss Big Bloy, him

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say 'Wing, what do fo Missee Nola clos to lide?' Me say, 'Long tlime go ol missee she catch um clos for lady fliend clome stay Las Losas—you mind?' Boss Big Bloy, him say sure he mind. Me say, 'Ol missee lady fliend, she go way no take um clos.' Boss Big Bloy, him find um clos, tell Wing Foo take fo Missee Nola."

Pablo and Wing Foo were with Gray at the gate when Nora reappeared. As the Irish girl came toward them the vaquero crossed himself and whispered: "Mother of God! It ees la Señora herself come back to us."

Reverently he showed the girl how to mount and assisted her into the saddle. Carefully he showed her how to hold the reins. And all the while he was assuring her that Sarco understood, that he would go carefully and would take good care of her.

As Nora and Gray rode away the Mexican and the Chinaman stood watching them.

"By damn," said Pablo softly, "never did I hope to see a sight such as dis again before I die. Since the time of la Señora, la Señorita ees the only woman for such a horse—and for such a woman there ees only Sarco. What you think, Wing—ees it the old days of Las Rosas come back to us?"

The old Chinaman answered with plaintive hopefulness: "Mebby so—no can tell—you clome long klitchen, Pablo, catch um littee bit dlink."

As they started toward the house, Holdbrook came out and stood on the veranda, looking after the student and the girl. And Jim Holdbrook, as he stood there watching, was moved by emotions which to

him were new and strange. From the earliest years of his manhood this man, holding the creed that the chief end of man is to be amused and the only purpose of life is to gratify one's every desire, had looked upon women much as a hunter looks upon his game. He had considered his proposition to the Las Rosas men the evening of Nora's arrival a very sportsmanlike solution of their problem, and Morgan's prompt and vigorous rebuke had shocked him in more ways than one. But he had not for a moment thought of relinquishing his game because Morgan chose to act in a manner so brutally unsportsmanlike. Then the Irish girl, herself, had proven a revelation to him. He had missed no opportunity of being in her company, and had tried all his usually successful methods of approach, but with no sign of encouragement. The girl did not appear to be even aware of his efforts. He was puzzled. He told himself that he had never before met such a woman. He might have reflected that in the world to which he belonged such a woman would have been impossible. But the very difficulties which Nora so innocently presented served only to stimulate his interest in her, while at the same time he was dimly conscious that she had awakened something within him that had never been stirred before. With amazement he realized now that he was not angry because the girl he had asked to ride with him should choose to go with Gray. He was hurt. That was the thing which astounded him. He was hurt. And he was hurt, not because he was denied the pleasure of her company, but because he felt in his

heart that she was right to refuse him and accept Gray.

Wing Foo and Pablo disappeared hurriedly around the corner of the building and as they went toward the kitchen door they laughed.

As for Gray and Nora, it was quite inevitable that they should, on their ride that morning, lay the foundation for an enduring friendship. Already the student and the Irish girl had recognized—as such souls must—their kinship. They needed only a definite mutual interest to establish the bond.

Sarco was so gentle and steady and moved with a step so sure and easy that the Irish girl's natural timidity soon vanished, and she was free to enjoy to the full the beauty of the scenes and the exhilaration of the healthful exercise. And the man of books, much to his surprise, was soon forced to admit to himself that he, too, was enjoying the ride.

In the limited circle of his friends, and in the environment of his student life, Charlie Gray had become a stranger to those wholesome pleasures which, after all, are so largely physical. This Irish girl had awakened in him something that was not usual to his intellectual habits and aesthetic emotions. She had caused him to feel the call of forces that are not bound in books. The fire of her enthusiasm for life and, as he himself might have said, for mere human beings, had dropped a spark on the dry wood of his philosophies and he felt a warmth to which he was not accustomed. As she had talked to him and to the others he had been thrilled with a flash of something so real, so vital and vitalizing

that he was forced to wonder if, with all his study, he was not, after all, missing the really big things of life. And now every step of his horse was carrying, him back, as it were, to those glorious years when he too, had been in love with life—and to those wonderful months of his boyhood when he had ridden amid the same scenes with Big Boy Morgan.

It was these memories that led him to tell Nora of an ancient ruin that stood not far from the house and after an hour's riding to suggest that they turn back and visit this scene of so many of his boyhood adventures. Dismounting they soon explored all that remained of the ancient adobe structure and then seated themselves in the shadow of the crumbling walls to rest a while before continuing their ride.

It was easy for Gray to lead the Irish girl to talk of her home—of her father and mother—their poverty—their love—their dreams of America. Simply and frankly, she told him of her childhood responsibilities and her efforts to be mother and father and sister to her brother, while they often were actually wanting food. Then came the story of the fulfillment, in part, of their dreams by Larry's coming to America—and then her mother's death. And now—now she herself was here. And because of what she believed he had done for those she loved and for her and, perhaps, because of something else of which the girl herself was not fully conscious, all that she told led to Big Boy Morgan.

It was as easy for Nora to move her companion to tell her of his family and home—a family that had

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taken no small part in the founding of her beloved America—a home that was very different from that poverty-stricken home in Ireland. The magic of her appreciative understanding and sympathy broke down the last barrier of the man's aloofness and he talked to her as he had never talked to any one, of the most intimate things of his life. And because of the memories awakened by their ride and their surroundings, his talk, too, led to Big Boy Morgan.

And then, as they continued their ride, they saw on every side the things of which the young ranchman's life was made. The rolling sea of grassy hills, the blue and purple mountains, the valley with its quiet trees and peaceful meadows, the buildings and corrals, the pond, the cattle and horses, the vast sky so deep and blue, the sunshine, the very air that was so pure and invigorating, it was all Jack Morgan's inheritance. In a deeper sense, it *was* Jack Morgan. The master of Las Rosas was as much the product of his birthright and environment as Jim Holdbrook was the creature of his world; as Charlie Gray was the product of his schools and libraries and institutions of art; as Nora O'Shea was the child of the love, devotion, service, and sacrifice that had given life to her soul and character.

And so the man of books and the Irish girl, that morning, found the bond of their friendship—a friendship that was to be to them, all the years of their lives, a very beautiful thing.

They were nearing the house when Nora asked: "Do you know what this business is that my brother Larry has gone to attend to for Mr. Morgan?"

SARCO

"No, not exactly—it is something about cattle, I suppose," returned Gray. "You know they sometimes bring herds across the line from Mexico," he added vaguely.

"And could it be that this trip of Larry's to wherever it is that he's gone has anything to do with Mr. Morgan's trouble?"

"I don't think so."

"Well, I wish Larry would hurry and come home, just the same," she said wistfully. "I'm that wild to see the boy 'tis hard to wait. And 'tis sure I am that Larry would know better than any one of us what's the matter with Mr. Morgan. My brother told me often in his letters, do you see, how close they were."

Charlie Gray smothered a groan—God help Nora O'Shea when her disillusionment came. Could she—could any human heart—endure such a test?

Wing Foo met them at the gate. Solemnly the old Chinaman said: "Holdblook man him gone Alivaca—Boss Big Bloy, him gone Tucson—no good, him to Tucson—mebby so play cards, dlink—mebby so make um dlunk—laise all kind hell. Me catch um lunch now."

Jake Zobetser was enjoying what he called a "play spell" with the baby when Cora appeared in the door between the living-room and the office. "Look at him, Cora, look at that, would you?" He held the laughing, crowing infant at arms length. "See how he is already so fat and strong. Oh, but he is the big boy Zobetser. He is the one what will

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some day show these respectable fools what is power and what is wealth and what is respectability."

The woman answered with a nod of her head toward the office. "Come in here, Jake, I have something to tell you."

"What is now the matter?" he growled. "Is it that I am not to have one little minute with my grandson but you bring to me some troubles, heh?"

But when she disappeared into the office, he gave the child to its nurse and followed her. "Well," he demanded as he closed the door behind him and stood glowering at her with heavy displeasure, "what is it now?"

She answered significantly: "Big Boy Morgan is in town."

"And that should worry me, I guess."

"It would, if you are as wise as you think you are," she retorted. "I saw Simpkins at the store a few minutes ago and he told me. He says Morgan knows that Larry O'Shea is at Black Canyon."

Zobetser laughed. "So at last he has found his Irishman, heh?"

"All right, laugh," she snapped, "but Simpkins says Big Boy has already had a drink or two, and that you had better keep out of his way. You can do as you like, of course."

Zobetser shuffled hurriedly to the street door of the office.

"I locked it when I came in," said the woman mockingly.

"Bah, we should be afraid of that fool," he returned, pacing the floor. "Simpkins shall look

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to it that there is a little party for him at Willie's, and before morning he will forget even his name. Have I not before seen men like him, go like he is going? Always it is the same with such fools—they start so strong and they finish so good for nothing. To-day they are giants who would step on me in the dust under their boots, to-morrow they are the worms that I step on with my boots."

"All the same, we ought never to have let that Irish girl go to Las Rosas."

"Always you are squawking," he retorted. "Did not the word come last night how all is well at Black Canyon? It is as I said it would be—those Las Rosas fools will never tell a girl like her about her brother. And the brother, he will not dare to let a sister like her know where he is."

"Have it your way, Jake, but you will see. She is bound to get in touch with Larry sooner or later, and when she does—good night! Miss Nora O'Shea will frame a wild party for us, all right—all right."

The man raised his fat hands in a gesture of despair. "But what could we do with such a girl like that—I ask you?"

"You should have sent her away—out of the country, so far that she could never get back."

The man nodded a gloomy assent, but even as he acknowledged the truth of her statement he said mournfully: "But, my dear, you forget how good she was to my baby."

CHAPTER X

MEMORIES

THE Chinaman's blunt revelation of his Boss Big Boy's habits struck Nora with the force of a blow. At first she refused utterly to believe it. But Charlie Gray's manner; the remarks of the cowboys when they came in from their day's work; and, above all, Jim Holdbrook's comments, forced her finally to accept the truth.

The Irish girl was not unfamiliar with the effect of such dissipations as these to which it now appeared the master of Las Rosas was given. From her earliest childhood she had heard of the young wastrels of the countryside—sons of gentlemen who had brought shame to their parents, dishonor to the family name, and black disaster to themselves. Often she had witnessed, in the neighborhood of her home, scenes which would never be effaced from her memory. Did she not know how Tim O'Halloran beat his wife until she died? Was not Molly Donovan's back all twisted out of shape from the effect of a blow struck by her drunken father? Could she ever forget how poor Jimmie McCollough killed a man in a brawl and was hanged? And had she not watched and prayed and fought all the years of her girlhood to keep her own Larry boy safe?

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When the men of Las Rosas asked Nora to sing that evening she tried. But there was that in her songs which caused the cowboys to wonder and to keep very still. There were tears in the eyes of Charlie Gray, while Holdbrook felt again the stir of those emotions which to him were strange.

During the forenoon of the following day Holdbrook tried to make himself agreeable to the Irish girl, but soon gave it up. Gray, with better understanding, left her to herself. She worked among the roses for awhile and spent an hour at the corral with Sarco, but most of the time she was in her room. It was sometime in the afternoon when she determined to go for a walk.

A half mile or so from the ranch house and up the little valley from the big pond there was another watering place. This pond, not nearly so large as the one by the road, was in a small pasture that was used only for gentle, pure-bred cattle, mares with colts, and by a few horses that, for various reasons, were entitled to that special privilege. The spot was so tucked away in a little hollow and so hidden by mesquite trees that there was little chance of a person, unfamiliar with the ranch, seeing it at all. Nora had been to the place twice with Charlie Gray, and Morgan had assured her that she would be perfectly safe in that particular pasture any time she chose to walk there. Because she wished, this afternoon, to be alone with her thoughts, the quiet retreat appealed to her.

She had been there an hour or more, sitting under a tree at one end of the little dam. The gentle white-

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faced Hereford cattle, that stood in the shallow pool or lay on the banks chewing their cuds in calm contentment, accepted her presence with scarce a questioning look. Now and then a calf, all eyes and ears, would gaze at her wonderingly, until suddenly remembering that it was meal time, it would frisk away to its mild-eyed mother and the ever-ready refreshments. Groups of cattle from far corners of the pasture would come leisurely in single file over the hill to drink. Other groups, having slaked their thirst, were as leisurely drifting away to their feeding grounds. Wild doves came with soft mournful calls and killdeer wheeled with plaintive cries above the surface of the water, while in every tree and bush a variety of native birds twittered and chirped and sang. Then Nora heard the sound of horse's feet, and Big Boy Morgan rode over the hill and down to the other end of the dam.

The young master of Las Rosas did not notice the girl who was watching him from the shadow of the mesquite tree. For some time he sat on his horse looking at the cattle but apparently with little interest, as though his thoughts were far away. Then he dismounted and throwing the bridle reins over the horse's head, flung himself down on the bank, and lay with his face buried in his arms.

The Irish girl rose quietly to her feet and started to slip away without revealing her presence. She paused, stood for a moment irresolute, and then walked slowly across the dam toward the man on the ground.

He heard her step and raising his head saw her

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coming toward him. A moment he gazed, as one seeing a vision, then he sprang to his feet, hat in hand. "Miss O'Shea!"

"You'll forgive me, sir, if my presence is an intrusion," she said with her winning frankness. "I was sitting over there under that tree when you came and, if you'll not mind me saying it, you looked so lonesome that I had not the heart to go and leave you alone as perhaps you're wishing I would."

"Shall we sit down?" he asked awkwardly.

When they were seated, he turned his face away and fixed his gaze upon some object at the edge of the water below them.

As she watched him a little smile stole over her face—much as a mother might smile upon a wayward son. "I know well," she said gently, "how there are times when one would rather be alone. I have been that way myself—as I was all this day, which is the reason for me being here, do you see? But I know, too, that sometimes because a man is wishful to be left to himself is the very reason why he should not be."

Big Boy fumbled with his hat as he muttered: "I had to go to town on business—was detained—just got back."

"If I may be so bold, sir, was your business successful?"

He faced her suddenly with a reckless toss of his head. "I guess you know about what my business was."

She smiled.

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"Look here, Miss O'Shea," he said defiantly, "I know just what sort of a fool I am to cut loose the way I've been doing the past few months, but—well—there is a reason."

"'Tis mortal sure I am that a man like you could have no natural love for that sort of thing," she returned gently.

His eyes thanked her and with marvelous tact she continued: "'Twas wonderful of you, sir, to give me your mother's horse to ride, and her saddle, and the clothes. Pablo, and Wing, and Mr. Gray told me about your love for Sarco, and it all made me that happy—I can't begin to tell how proud and glad I am."

His reckless, defiant air vanished. "I wish you might have known my father and mother."

She was quick to see her advantage. "I shall always wish that I might, sir. Would you mind telling me about them?"

And so Big Boy Morgan's thoughts were drawn from the things of which he was ashamed and from whatever it was that drove him to such humiliating foolishness, and he talked of his pioneer parents—of their courage, and fortitude, and love, through those years when privations and hardships were common and death was always near. Under the spell of her interest and the magic of her sympathy, he told how El Rancho de Las Rosas had been won from that savage land and of his father's part in the larger affairs of the territory and state. And with this—forgetting for the moment how the Irish girl had come to Las Rosas—he told her the story of Jake

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Zobetser's Black Canyon, the man's thwarted ambitions, the character of his Black Canyon outfit, the war between the two ranches, and of the persistence of his father's powerful enemy.

She made no comment but led him on to tell of his father's plans for the future of the inheritance he had left to his son, and of the Arizona which he, the son of his father, was to have a part in building.

"And when dad used to talk to me about the future of Las Rosas as we rode together over the ranch, I used to see it all as he did, and dream of how I would carry on the work as he had planned it. I could have gone into some other business or profession when I finished school, but I chose the ranch because I loved it. Why, Miss O'Shea, I learned to swim right here in this little pond." His voice broke and for a few minutes he was silent.

The Irish girl's face was radiant.

Presently he continued: "After father and mother died and left everything in my hands, things seemed to go all right for a time. Then—but there's no use talking about that," he finished abruptly. "What's done is done and it can't be helped."

"And that's not true at all, thanks be to God," she cried indignantly. "If it was, this world would be a sorry place for sure. There's no one, sir, but spends half his life undoing the things he does in the other half—and most of us are so divided between hope and regret that we've no heart left to be enjoying what we have."

He smiled grimly as he rose to his feet. Without giving her an opportunity for another word he made

a brusque excuse for leaving her, mounted his horse and rode away.

"'Tis exactly like he was caught in a trap of some sort," Nora said to Charlie Gray when she had returned to the house. "And whatever it is that's caught him 'tis something that his strength can't break. That's what's the matter with him. He's a strong man, but as you may have seen before, sir, 'tis often the strong ones when they're trapped that are most likely to smash themselves."

"He will certainly succeed in smashing himself and everything else if he keeps on," returned Gray.

"For shame, sir," she cried. "'Tis you, of all men, should know that he can't keep on."

"Why not?"

"Simply because 'tis not in his nature. His heart is not in it. And a man can't succeed even in working his own ruin if his heart isn't set that way. And besides whatever his trouble is, Mr. Morgan has a friend by the name of Charlie Gray to help him."

The student gazed at her indignantly. "I would like to know how I am to help him when he won't even tell me what his trouble is."

"And have you never thought, sir, how it might be your worrying so much about your own self that has kept the poor boy from taking his troubles to you, as he has the right to do? Forgive me for saying it, but 'tis yourself that has never given yourself a chance to help your friend."

And the student was forced to admit that the Irish girl had somehow managed to touch the heart of the whole matter.

CHAPTER XI

DOLORES

NORA was working in the rose garden and Charlie Gray, much to Wing Foo's delight, was helping her. As they worked they talked, for the man of books never tired of listening to the Irish girl's characteristic expressions of her wholesome philosophy of life. Nora, herself, did not even suspect that she had such a thing as a philosophy of life but the student knew, just as students always know a great deal more about people than people ever know about themselves.

"And every soul of us, do you see, is just like these roses," she was saying, while her pruning shears snipped away the dead wood of a neglected bush. "We die in spots and the spots have to be cut away; and we grow a lot of useless branches that need to be trimmed; and we must have the soil stirred about our roots; and some kinds of us have to be supported with a trellis or something—and when all this is done for us and we make a rose or two we think we've done it all by ourselves with no thanks to anybody."

Charlie Gray straightened his tired back. "It certainly is a job—but I suppose it's worth the effort."

"Is it worth it, do you say? Why, man, you'll not know yourself by another week."

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He laughed: "But I was speaking of our garden."

"And so was I," she retorted. "When you think of it, what else is there to do in life anyway, save just to help the old bushes to make roses."

The student was thinking it over when their attention was caught by the sound of a galloping horse and they looked to see a young woman riding toward them.

"Speaking of roses," murmured Charlie Gray, and disappeared hurriedly into the house.

Never had Nora O'Shea seen a girl like this dark-haired, dark-eyed, vivid creature who rode her half wild horse with such unconscious ease and grace.

"*Buenos días*, Señorita," she called with a flash of white teeth as she reined her spirited mount up to the picket fence.

"The top of the morning to you, miss," returned the Irish girl gaily, her expressive face beaming with admiration as she went forward. "Sure, and you are the most beautiful thing I ever saw in all my days."

The girl laughed with delight at the outspoken compliment. "*Gracias*, but it ees you that ees the beautiful one. Me, I am only Dolores of that Black Canyon. All the time I hear at Arivaca how they talk about the beautiful Señorita who lives now at El Rancho de Las Rosas, and so I theenk I will go for myself to see."

"Come down, child, come down off that horse before the crazy beast throws you over the fence into the roses. 'Tis happy to meet you I am, but 'tis happier I would be to see you safe on the ground."

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The girl leaped from her saddle and with the bridle rein in her hand came closer to the fence. "*Gracias*, Señorita, but no, no," she returned in reply to Nora's invitation to come in. "It ees not for me thees time to stay but only one leetle minute—some other time, if it ees your wish I will come for what you call, a veesit." She looked about. "Oh, but Las Rosas, it ees so beautiful—such gran' house, not like our poor leetle hut in that Black Canyon. Señor Morgan, he ees not at home, heh?"

"Mr. Morgan and the men are all away with the cattle somewhere—Bear Valley, I think they said—if there is such a place."

"*Si*, and Señor Holdbrook, he ees not at home, too?"

"He is with his soldier friends at Arivaca, I believe. But Mr. Gray is somewhere about. I will call him."

"No, no, Señorita, it ees to see you that I come." She regarded the Irish girl curiously. "Me, I theenk you mus' be ver' happy to live at thees wonderful Las Rosas, Señorita."

"It would be heaven," returned Nora simply, "if only my brother Larry was here."

"*Si*, Señorita, your brother Larry—me, I know about heem."

"You know Larry?"

With another flash of white teeth and a gay toss of her head she answered: "*Si*, me, I know all the cowboys and all the cowboys they know Dolores. But your brother he never did once try to make me love heem—not even one leetle bit."

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Nora looked doubtful at this but only said: "The boy is away on business for Mr. Morgan. I wish he would be coming home."

"Oh, but your brother, he ees all right, Señorita. You mus' not too much theenk for heem—with all these men of Las Rosas to make the love to you."

"And why should you be talking like that?" demanded Nora with a show of indignation. "Is it that kind of a hussy you're thinking I am?"

The girl's face was eloquent as she returned: "Hussy?—I do not know what you mean, hussy. It ees nothing what I say, Señorita—no, no. It ees not of the love that ees bad that I speak. But it ees as I say—all the men will love la Señorita Nora. How could they help when la Señorita ees so beautiful. Me—I theenk there will be no more any man for me now that Señorita Nora has come."

The Irish girl laughed. "I'm thinking 'tis you that can keep from being lonesome, just the same." And the Mexican girl laughed with her.

"But why ees it that you work like thees?" Dolores asked with a gesture toward the garden. "Me, I tell you, Señorita, the men they do not long love the woman what works for them. It ees the woman what makes the men work for her that ees all the time loved. And what ees it that men are for but to work for the women? It ees for them to get for us the things we want. And for that we give to them the love—a leetle—not too much—just a leetle—just so they will all the time want more and so they will all the time get for us more of the things

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that we want. No, no, Señorita, to work, like thees, it ees for you one big meestake."

"Sure, I like it," returned Nora soberly. "And do you not work yourself, Miss Dolores?"

"*Si*, me, all the time I work. That Injun Pete and his squaw, they make me."

"I should think a girl like you would be glad to work for the father and mother," said the Irish girl gently.

The other drew herself up proudly and her dark eyes flashed with scorn. "No, no—Injun Pete, he ees not my father—his old squaw ees not my mother. You theenk I am what you call half breed Injun? Do I look so? No, no, me—I am Mexican girl. My father and mother die when I leetle—I live with Injun Pete and his squaw—that ees all."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Dolores; forgive me for being that stupid."

The Mexican girl smiled graciously. "It ees never mind, Señorita. You did not know. Tell me please—thees Señor Gray—his father ees a ver' rich man?"

"I'm sure I can't say, but 'tis so I understand."

"*Si*, and Señor Holdbrook—ees it that his father ees so ver' rich, too?"

"'Tis so I believe."

Dolores sighed. "It mus' make for be ver' happy, Señorita, to have all the time so much money."

"You poor, foolish child," cried Nora impulsively, "money is not happiness."

Dolores laughed scornfully. "Me, I should like to

try. To live in a hole, Black Canyon, with Pete and his squaw—to go nowhere—to have no clothes—no jewels—to see nobody but cowboys—to know nothing—to be nothing—that ees me, *Señorita*. Oh, but you do not know—how could you know?" Her voice was a pitiful wail. She hung her head, her lithe form drooped as if in despair.

But before the Irish girl could speak the other drew herself erect and threw up her head defiantly. "But I will not stay shut up in that Black Canyon. You will see, *Señorita*. Pretty soon now—July first will come, and then I shall be no longer a poor homeless nobody. I shall have all the things I want—beautiful, beautiful things. And then I shall be happy—Oh, so happy—when I, Dolores, shall come to be la *Señora* of el rancho de Las Rosas."

"Mother of God! What's that you're telling me? You're to be the mistress of Las Rosas, you say?"

Dolores looked at her wonderingly. "*Si*, *Señorita*, did you not know?"

Nora O'Shea clung weakly to the fence for support and her face caused the warm-hearted Mexican girl to cry impulsively: "*Señorita*—you are ill. What ees it—can I not do something?"

Suddenly the Irish girl laughed desperately. "'Tis me that is crazy—listening to this foolishness that you are talking, child."

The other retorted with fiery spirit: "It ees so, for all that you laugh, *Señorita*—as you shall see." Then she added keenly: "Ees it that you theenk to be yourself la *Señora* of Las Rosas?"

Many thoughts were racing through Nora's mind:

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Big Boy Morgan's father and mother—his education—his friends—his love for the ranch—his memories—his father's plans—and this half-wild, ignorant but beautiful Black Canyon creature! Black Canyon—Zobetser—. She saw it all, now. This was the trap into which the son of his father had fallen.

"Why ees it that you say nothing, Señorita—can you not speak?"

Nora O'Shea answered calmly: "'Tis sure I am that any girl would be proud to be the mistress of Las Rosas. And 'tis myself that is wishing you much happiness, Miss Dolores."

"And it ees that you do not wish to have that happiness for yourself, Señorita?"

Again the Irish girl laughed. "And how could you be thinking me such a fool as to ever dream such a wild dream as that?" she returned. "No—no—'tis just to make a home for my brother Larry that I came all the way to America."

The Mexican girl studied her intently for a moment, then with a long sigh of relief and a bewildering smile said: "For one leetle minute you scare me like hell, Señorita. When they tell me how a Señorita so beautiful have come to live at Las Rosas, I theenk sure she will make for to take from me my man. So I come to see. But now, Señorita, I am not longer scare. So you and me will be the good friends, yes?"

The Irish girl forced another smile. "'Tis to be July first, you say?"

"Si—jus' one leetle month from to-day, Señorita—jus' only one leetle month."

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As easily as any of Morgan's cowboys could have done, she swung into the saddle and while her horse reared and plunged in a mad attempt to unseat her she called gaily: "Make the roses pretty for me, Señorita Nora. I shall love to have them so. But me, I shall not work like you for the men. It ees one big meestake that you make. *Adios.*"

CHAPTER XII

PABLO'S PLAN

SLOWLY, as one who had received a mortal hurt, the Irish girl went through the rose garden to the house. As she reached the veranda, Charlie Gray appeared in the doorway through which she must pass on her way to her room. The student started to make a laughing remark but was checked by the girl's face and manner.

"What has happened?" he cried. "Miss O'Shea—Nora—what is the matter?"

The girl, unable to escape, stood speechless, gazing at him with a look which filled him with alarm.

"You are ill—you are hurt!" he exclaimed.

His sympathy was the last touch, and she gave way to her overwrought emotions in tears while the man, supporting her to a chair, stood helplessly by.

But Nora did not long indulge herself in this womanly relief. Lifting up her face to him she suddenly laughed in her grief with a bravery which wrung his heart.

"Sure, I never knew before that I could be so many kinds of a fool at the same time. 'Tis me that should be thanking the Mexican girl for making me known to myself."

The student was very grave. Had the caller told

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Nora about her brother? Aloud, he said casually: "It was that Dolores girl from Black Canyon, was it not?"

"It was. And 'tis that same Dolores girl from Black Canyon that is to be the mistress of Las Rosas. I'm thinking, sir, that you'll not need to be wondering any longer about your friend Mr. Morgan's trouble."

Charlie Gray looked at the Irish girl as though he feared she were losing her mind. "What on earth are you talking about?"

"'Tis the truth I'm talking, no less. 'Twas the girl herself told me in so many words. She is to marry Mr. Morgan come the first of July. And then the little vixen, she laughed at me for working in the garden and told me to make the roses pretty for her." And with that Nora sprang to her feet and escaped to the seclusion of her room.

Charlie Gray carefully considered the Irish girl's discovery of what she believed to be Big Boy Morgan's trouble. But as he recalled his friend's enthusiasm when at the time of the young ranchman's visit to Philadelphia, Morgan had detailed to him and to his father his plans for developing his inheritance, it was impossible, all things considered, to believe that Morgan had given a thought even to the Black Canyon girl. It was as impossible not to see that something had happened to the young master of Las Rosas since the time of his visit to his Philadelphia friends. Thoughtfully, the student reviewed all that he had observed since his arrival at the Morgan ranch—what he knew of Jim Holdbrook—

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Holdbrook's affair with Dolores—Morgan's attitude toward his guest. And the more he considered the situation the more Charlie Gray was forced to admit that Nora might be right in her belief that the half-wild Mexican girl was the cause of Jack Morgan's state of mind. But again, if it was an infatuation for this Black Canyon beauty that had wrought such a change in Big Boy Morgan, and if she was the cause of the evident feeling between Morgan and his guest, why in the name of all that was decent did Holbrook stay on at Las Rosas? The more Gray puzzled over the matter the more puzzling it became. Nor did the student fail to note the effect of Dolores' announcement upon the Irish girl herself. To say the least, Nora's agitation was significant.

It was Wing Foo who gave Gray a hint as to where he might find a key to the problem. The Chinaman, on his way to the barn for eggs, paused to remark: "Dololes gal clome talk Misse Nola—no good, Miste Chollie."

Gray regarded the old servant thoughtfully. "What's wrong with Dolores, Wing?"

"Ah-h-h, she Black Canyon gal—no good. Long tline she an Pablo make um love. Holdbrook man him clome. Dololes gal make um love him. No good fo gal make um love two, thlee man allee same tline. Mebby so Pablo him kill Holdbrook man—that mo bettee."

"That might help some," murmured Gray as the Chinaman shuffled on his way. "By George!" he said to himself a moment later, "I wonder—"

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It was in the afternoon of the following day when Holdbrook found Nora under the umbrella tree. There was a basket of mending on the rustic table beside her but the girl's hands were idle.

"Day dreaming?" he asked lightly as he seated himself at the other side of the table.

Without answering, the girl caught up her work and began plying her needle with an energy which fully occupied her attention.

The man waited a little, then in a manner very unlike his usual bold assurance said: "You didn't work in the garden this morning?"

She flashed a quick look at him and with her eyes again on her work agreed simply: "No, sir, I did not."

"What's the matter—Gray find the work too hard?"

The girl smiled. "He has made no complaints, sir."

No one could have doubted the sincerity of Holdbrook's hearty reply. "It is amazing what you have done for Charlie Gray, Miss O'Shea. He is a new man since you came. By the way, where is he to-day? I haven't seen him since breakfast?"

Nora laughed, as mothers sometimes laugh when they speak in pride of their children: "Sure, and you'd never guess in a month of Sundays. He's away riding with Pablo somewhere after some horses. You should have seen them. 'Twould have done your heart good. Mr. Morgan was telling Pablo what he wanted and where he was to go, and when Mr. Gray offered to go along and

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help, Mr. Morgan was near falling off his horse with the surprise."

Holdbrook laughed with her and there was a note in his laughter which made the Irish girl look at him questioningly. The man, meeting her look, was a little embarrassed as if not quite sure of himself. Nora turned again to her work and waited.

"Miss O'Shea."

"Yes, sir."

"I—I want you to know that Charlie Gray is not the only one—I mean, I wish you could know what you have done for me."

And this time when the Irish girl's frank, steady eyes met his the color rushed into the man's cheeks. Then he burst out with savage bitterness: "Of course you think I'm just talking to make an impression. You don't believe it possible for me to be sincere. Nobody believes there is any good in me. Nobody ever has. Ever since I can remember, people have always taken it for granted that I was a natural-born liar and everything else that is no good. My own father, even, has never in my whole life trusted me or let me feel that he expected anything decent of me. And—well—I guess I've lived up to it all right. I don't blame you for feeling the way you do about me."

The mother look was in her eyes now as she said gently: "And how is it that you're thinking I feel?"

"Don't you suppose I *know*? Do you think for a minute that I haven't seen how you are different with Gray and with Morgan and the others? From

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the very first you have made me understand that you thought I was no good."

"Well," she returned—and there was nothing but kindness and sympathy in her voice—"and are you any good?"

The man bowed his head. "No," he answered hopelessly, "I'm not."

She waited.

"But I might be," he went on aloud as if talking to himself. "I never thought of it this way before—never thought of it in any way, as a matter of fact, until—well—until you made me."

The girl's hands were busy with her sewing and her eyes were fixed on her work. The man raised his head and looked at her long and steadily with a curious, reverent, wondering gaze. But she did not turn her face toward him or seem in the least conscious of anything unusual in either his words or his manner. Still watching her, Holdbrook continued slowly in a meditative tone, almost as if he were merely thinking aloud: "When you first came I thought you were like all the other women I have known."

"Of course, you would be thinking that," she murmured, her eyes still on her work.

"I suppose you know what happened to me the night you came," he said defiantly, as if he had suddenly reached a decision.

"You mean when you were took with the stroke or something?"

He laughed bitterly. "I guess they've told you what sort of a stroke it was."

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She looked at him quickly. "Indeed, sir, and I only know what I saw—with you in a faint and the boys working over you and helping you into the house."

"Do you mean to say that neither Gray nor Morgan nor any one has told you?"

Her face convinced him as she answered: "No one has told me anything."

He pondered over this for some time then he said suddenly: "Well, I'll tell you—the truth is, I said something about you that wasn't decent, and Morgan knocked me down."

Her eyes shone with laughter, but her face was grave as she murmured: "Glory be! What children they all are—and me feeling so sorry for you."

"He ought to have stamped me into the ground," said Holdbrook harshly.

"As for that," she returned bending her head low over her work, "it may be as well that he did not."

"I admit," Holdbrook continued desperately, "that at first I tried to be agreeable to you because—well—because you are a very attractive woman and I—well—Oh, you understand—I wanted to win you for—just for my amusement."

With no sign of resentment or anger the Irish girl remarked calmly: "Which was to be expected, do you see, you being the kind of a man you are."

For a moment the man was dumb with amazement, then: "Do you mean that you do not care—that you do not hate and despise me?"

"Why, as for that, sir, I'm only a woman, and

'tis a thing that every woman is bound to expect from men like you."

For some time after that Jim Holdbrook did not speak. At last he said earnestly: "Miss O'Shea, I have told you this because—well—because you have made me realize things that I never even considered before. I have never known a woman like you. I have never believed that there were such women. I am sorry. I—"

Before the Irish girl could reply they saw Pablo coming through the gate in the picket fence. The *vaquero*, hat in hand, bowed low.

"Excuse, Señorita, Señor Holdbrook, the lieutenant at Arivaca he tell me to say he would wish to see you *pronto*."

When Holdbrook was gone the Mexican, who was leaning against the umbrella tree rolling a cigarette, murmured: "Excuse, Señorita, please—me, I tell little lie to that man. I have not speak with the lieutenant at Arivaca."

"Pablo!"

"*Si*, Señorita, excuse please—but I make for that man to go away so me, I can have with you a little talk. Señor Gray, he say it ees for me to come. That man Holdbrook, he ees no matter."

"And what have you done with Mr. Gray?"

"He ees stop at corral—pretty quick he will come. It ees like I say, he want that I, Pablo, shall tell to la Señorita Nora what I dis morning tell to him."

The girl placed her sewing on the table. "Sit down, man, sit down and be comfortable."

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The *vaquero* sat on the ground, his back against the tree, and deliberately finished his cigarette.

"Well, 'tis me that's listening to you, Pablo," said Nora.

"*Si*, Señorita, it ees like dis. When Señor Gray an' me go for the horses—Señor Gray, he can ride some too, me, I tell you—don't be fooled because that man all time read in books—no—no—"

"And is that what Mr. Gray sent you to tell me?"

The *vaquero* smiled. "No, no, Señorita, excuse please. It ees my love for Dolores that Señor Gray say I should tell to you."

"Dolores?"

"*Si*, Señorita. Long time now, me, I love Dolores an' Dolores she ees make the love with me. For me, Pablo, there ees no woman but Dolores. For my Dolores there ees no man but Pablo. For long time we very happy with our love. We make the plan that so soon as I save little more money for the home we will go to the priest. But, Señorita, would you not yourself like to be the gran' Señora of El Rancho de Las Rosas?"

At the question so unexpected the blood rushed to the Irish girl's cheeks, and she lowered her eyes in confusion.

"It ees so," said the Mexican calmly. "Me, I think it ees any woman would like that. My Dolores she love me, I know, but she will not now make the plan with me to go to the priest. No, no, she make the plan to be the gran' Señora of Las Rosas. She think that ees for her the best. She do not know—me, I know—I know. An' so before

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it ees too late—if there ees no other way for me, I will kill that Jim Holdbrook—jus' like I kill one snake to save my Dolores."

The Irish girl started from her chair. "Pablo, man—what is this you're saying? For the love of God, speak plain. 'Tis Holdbrook that's—that's—"

"Si, Señorita, it ees like I tell you. Jim Holdbrook he ees make the love to my Dolores. He ees tell to her if she make the love with him, he will go with her to the priest, an' she will be the gran' Señora of Las Rosas."

"But, Pablo, 'tis a foolish notion. How can any man but Mr. Morgan make any woman mistress of Mr. Morgan's ranch?"

Pablo shook his head. "Me, I no can tell you that, Señorita. I can tell only what my Dolores say to me when she will no longer make the plan to go with me to the priest. Ees it not as Señor Gray say, that my Dolores was come here to talk with you?"

"Yes."

"An' did she not herself say to you that she was to be la Señora of Las Rosas?"

"She did that, but sure, Pablo, 'twas me that thought—" Again the color came into the girl's cheeks.

Pablo smiled. "Ah, Señorita Nora, no—no—you make one big mistake, I think. Señor Morgan, he ees not like that. He ees all the time know of Dolores an' me, how we love. He ees all the time one damn good friend. He ees help me, Pablo, to save the money. He ees glad for Dolores an' me.

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No—no—Señor Morgan ees not like what you think, Señorita.”

When the Irish girl could speak she said: “’Tis a sure thing, Pablo, that Holdbrook is lying to Dolores about Las Rosas.”

“Me, I not so sure,” returned the Mexican significantly. “Why ees it that Señor Morgan ees all the time say the work of tallying the cattle must be finish July first, heh? Why ees it that we must tally the cattle if there ees not something to happen to Las Rosas?”

“And ’twas July first that Dolores told me she was to be mistress of Las Rosas,” cried Nora.

“*Si*—me, I do not know how it ees but jus’ the same I think if you, Señorita Nora, wish to be mistress of Las Rosas you should be very good to Señor Holdbrook.”

“Faith, and that would be a pretty price to pay for such an honor,” murmured the girl.

“Listen to what I say, Señorita—do not make mistake. My Dolores, she do not have the love for dis man Holdbrook. She have all time the love for me, Pablo. Me, I am her man that she love, jus’ like she ees my woman. By damn, it ees so, as I know. With jus’ man an’ man—Holdbrook an’ Pablo—he could not take from me my Dolores, of that I am so sure as hell. But with the ranch—Ah, that ees something else! For the woman the man’s love ees good, *si*, but it ees not all the time enough. The woman she want the dress, the jewel, the gran’ house, all the beautiful things she want jus’ as the butterfly want the sun. If there ees for the woman

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no way to have the sun, then she will be only jus' for the love. But when all the beautiful things she want are for her to take if only jus' she say the word—well, then you can not sometime tell where ees the love."

"Sure, Pablo, 'tis always her man that a woman loves best at the last, though she may fool herself into thinking different for a time."

"*Si*, Señorita, it ees at the last only the man, but when the woman find how she ees make the mistake it ees then too late—the man he ees gone. She have then no love—she have only things, an' so ees her unhappiness. I do not want for my Dolores to make dis mistake. Many time I think I kill—but to kill ees not good if there can be some other way. Then la Señorita Nora come to Las Rosas, an' she show to me the way my Dolores will come back to me. If it ees not for la Señorita Nora, dis man Holdbrook he be in hell now an' Pablo mabby he be in hell with him, too."

"I'm thinking you'll need to speak plain, Pablo, what are you meaning to say?"

The vaquero deliberately rolled another cigarette. "Dis man Holdbrook who can give to his woman el rancho de Las Rosas, he ees love la Señorita Nora."

"'Tis crazy you are, Pablo."

"No—no—it ees so. All the time I see how he try to be with you—how he want to make the love. All the time I see his eyes when he watch you—when you make the fun with the cowboys—when you sing—when you go for ride with Señor Gray—

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when you work with the roses—all the time he watch—watch—all the time the love ees in his eyes. An' sometime, Señorita, in the night when you do not know, he ees stan' in the dark here under the tree to watch the window of the room where la Señorita ees sleep. Me, do I not know what it ees to love? Do I not know what it ees to watch my Dolores? Pretty quick now, Señorita, dis man Jim Holdbrook, he will eat his heart for you—me, I know."

"But, Pablo, man, supposing your wild thoughts were true, what has this to do with you and Dolores?"

"Do you not see, Señorita—it ees so easy. If Señorita Nora will let Holdbrook make the love with her, then will he give to Señorita Nora Las Rosas, an' Dolores will come back to me, Pablo, her man what she love."

"'Tis a grand schemer you are, Pablo—but I'm thinking 'tis your Dolores would scratch the eyes out of any woman that would try what you're proposing."

"No, no—la Señorita does not understan'. If la Señorita Nora take dis Holdbrook man from my Dolores—Dolores she will not hurt because she have not the love for him. It ees as I tell you, her love ees all for me, Pablo. If I, Pablo, should make the love with another—by damn, then would my Dolores kill both Pablo an' the other. *Si*, Señorita, it ees so. A woman's love it ees a very funny thing."

"Sure, and there is only one thing as funny,"

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murmured the Irish girl, "and that is a man's love for a woman. But tell me, Pablo, did Mr. Gray send you to say all this to me?"

The Mexican smiled. "No-o-o—You see it ees like dis, Señorita—Señor Gray an' me, when we go for the horses we come to the—what you call ruin by the hill a little way from the corral—you know the place—the old 'dobe house what ees all broke down?"

"Yes."

"*Si*, an' Señor Gray, he say to me jus' then: 'Pablo, ees it not that you one time love Dolores?' '*Si*, Señor,' I tell him, but it ees not one time that I love Dolores—it ees all the time. An' then, Señorita, because my heart it ees hurt so for the place where we are I tell Señor Gray how it ees there at the ruin where Dolores an' me for the first time make the love. It ees there where we come many time for our love an' to make the plan when we shall go to the priest. It ees there one time she tell me Holdbrook ees to make her la Señora of Las Rosas, an' so she will not longer make the plan with me. An' it ees there, too, by damn, that she, my Dolores, mus' come back to me. All the time, Señorita, in the night I go to that old ruin to wait for my Dolores. That ees what I tell to Señor Gray, an' so he say I shall tell it to you, Señorita Nora—for why? It ees Señor Gray say that Señorita Nora will help me. When I ask to know how it ees that la Señorita Nora will help, Señor Gray say: 'that I can not tell, Pablo.' An' so me, I think for myself how la Señorita can help. But *that* I tell only to you, Señorita—I do not tell that to Señor Gray."

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“And do you think, Pablo, that I could be giving any man love just for the things he would give me?”

“No, no, Señorita, it ees not that you would go with Holdbrook to the priest. It ees only that you will bring my Dolores back to me. When Dolores ees safe with me, the man that she love, then you, Señorita, will go to the man you love.”

“The man I love?” said Nora slowly.

“Si, Señorita. Me, I know. I have watch your eyes too. I know. An' that man that you love, he will wait for you, Señorita, jus' the same that I wait for my Dolores. It will not hurt for you a little the make believe love with Holdbrook who all the time only make believe with my Dolores. Please, Señorita, you will help Pablo? You will send my Dolores back to me where I wait for her at the place of our love?”

CHAPTER XIII

THE CONTROLLING INTEREST

WHEN Dolores came to pay her promised visit to Nora, the Irish girl received her with a welcome so sincere and with feeling so genuine that the warm-hearted girl from Black Canyon was deeply moved. It was an experience new to this half-wild child-woman who, reared by Indian Pete and his squaw, had never known the sympathy and understanding of a woman like Nora O'Shea. Before an hour had passed Larry's sister had so won the confidence of Pablo's Dolores that the Mexican girl was revealing to her without reserve all the innermost things of her life. And the Irish girl in return gave a full measure of that wholesome philosophy and love with which she herself was so richly endowed.

"Never have I had the frien' like you, Señorita Nora," said the Mexican girl as she was leaving. "Never have I had one to talk to me so the mother talk. It ees that you make me feel in my heart how love it ees the only thing. Me, I want like hell to have the things that Señor Jim Holdbrook say I will have wid heem. But, oh, I want my Pablo too. That ees what it ees to be a woman, heh?"

"Sure, and 'tis more than that to be a woman, mavourneen."

"*Si?* And what is more?"

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"The babies," returned the Irish girl gently. "'Tis your own heart must tell you, Dolores, darling, if you'll but listen as you should, how there's no unhappiness can come to a woman like having the wrong father to her little ones."

"*Si*, it ees so. Me, I know how it ees, la Señorita Nora, that have the mother heart. Was there not the baby on the train? It ees because of the mother heart of la Señorita that I can tell to her the things like I have tell to-day—the things I can tell to no one else in all the world."

"You know about the baby on the train?" exclaimed Nora.

Dolores smiled. "*Si*, Señorita, but do not ask how it ees that I know. It ees only of the things that are of me, myself, that I tell to you. *Adios*, Señorita, wid the mother heart. For all that you tell to me of the love, *gracias*. Me, I will not forget to theenk of the babies, like what you say. I will not forget to theenk of the love—*gracias*."

As Dolores rode away, the Irish girl was saying to herself: "And what would be the things she can't talk about, I wonder." Then the girl from Black Canyon disappeared over the first hill, and Nora went straight to Charlie Gray.

She found him working in a far corner of the rose garden.

"Well?" he said as she drew near.

"Put down that hoe and listen to me."

When they were seated on a near-by rustic bench, she began abruptly: "'Tis all true—Holdbrook takes charge of Las Rosas July first."

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Gray jerked a rose from a branch that brushed his shoulder and slowly pulled it to pieces. "How did it happen, Nora?"

The Irish girl drew a long breath. "Dolores, herself, doesn't know more than this that she told me. Jim Holdbrook's father owns, right now, the controlling interest in Mr. Morgan's ranch. How or why 'twas done the girl can't say, but 'twas when Mr. Morgan was visiting you in Philadelphia."

"Good Lord!" groaned the student.

"Yes, sir—and old Holdbrook sent his boy, Jim, out here to live at Las Rosas and learn the business with the promise that if Mr. Jim stays on the ranch one year and behaves himself, his father is to make him a present of that controlling interest."

"God in heaven!" ejaculated Gray. "What a situation—Big Boy Morgan's inheritance put up as a prize by that old thief, Holdbrook, to keep his worthless son, Jim, from getting himself into the penitentiary."

"'Tis the truth, sir. And the year is up July first."

"I see," muttered Gray. "So that's why Morgan is tallying the Las Rosas cattle—getting everything in shape to turn the ranch over to Holdbrook. Poor old Jack! And Jim is going to marry that Mexican girl and settle down is he—Hm!"

The Irish girl smiled. "Why, sir, as to that, it is as it may be."

Gray looked at her quickly. "Now what do you mean?" he demanded.

She answered demurely: "I mean, sir, that

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Dolores loves Pablo, and when a woman loves—or a man either for that matter—'tis anything may happen, do you see?"

"I can see what will happen to Jack Morgan with the control of Las Rosas in the hands of the Holdbrooks. They'll put him down and out for sure. He won't even have a saddle horse of his own in a year."

"That may be the truth, sir, and again it may not. 'Tis many things that could happen in a year. Your friend, Big Boy Morgan, is no boy at all, sir, but a strong man, as I've told you before."

Gray smiled at her. "You believe in Jack Morgan, don't you, Nora?"

"As I believe in heaven, sir. And why would I not? You'll find when you learn how 'twas done that old Holdbrook just caught poor Mr. Big Boy in a trap of some sort or other, that was baited with something good that a fine man like Mr. Morgan would like."

"It's a pity we can't catch Jim Holdbrook in some kind of a trap."

"Sure, and that might be done too, sir, if—" she finished slowly: "if only we were to use the right kind of bait."

And the student noticed that the Irish girl's cheeks were flushed with color and that her eyes were shining with excitement.

"Would you mind telling me, sir, just what kind of a place is this Black Canyon where Dolores do be living?"

Gray hesitated. "Why—it's a ranch, you know."

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"Yes, sir—Mr. Morgan told me a little about it, but something that Dolores said, or rather would not say, set me to thinking."

"Thinking about what?" asked Gray quickly.

"About Holdbrook, and July first, and Dolores, and Black Canyon, and Indian Pete, and Zobetser, and everything. Why, what's wrong with me asking?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all, I assure you," answered Gray hastily.

"Oh," returned the Irish girl, clearly a little puzzled by the student's manner. "Well then, seeing there's no harm in me wanting to know—Who is this Indian Pete, and what sort is he?"

"Pete? Oh, he is Zobetser's foreman—the boss of the Black Canyon outfit, you know."

"Is he Indian?"

"No—he's white all right—I don't know what nationality."

"Well, Mr. Gray, I'm still listening."

And so in spite of his reluctance, the student was forced by the girl's persistent questions to tell her all that was known and much that was surmised of the operations of Big Boy Morgan's neighbors.

"'Tis a bad lot they are no doubt," mused the Irish girl. "And Holdbrook, so Dolores tells me, has spent most of his time at Black Canyon this past month."

"He was there or at the post in Arivaca every day before you came."

"'Tis easy to see how a man of his breed and

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raising would feel himself at home with this Indian Pete and his crew."

Gray faced her eagerly, as if moved by a startling thought.

But before he could speak she quickly changed the subject. "Mr. Gray, you'll forgive me asking, but is it true that your father is a very rich man?"

"Why, what are you getting at now?" demanded the baffled student.

"'Tis only this, sir," she smiled. "I'm thinking what a grand thing it would be for your friend, Mr. Morgan, and for you if your father was just to buy old Holdbrook's interest in Las Rosas and make you the same offer that Holdbrook made his son, Jim."

In spite of the seriousness of the situation, Charlie Gray laughed. "You Irish witch—and so you think I need reforming, do you?"

"As for that," she retorted, "I think you are fairly on the way to a better life as it is. I haven't noticed Wing Foo feeding you so many egg-nogs of late."

"Thanks to you," he said soberly.

"Thanks to your own good heart. But would your father do such a thing if you were to ask him?"

The girl was touched by the pride and love that shone in Charlie Gray's face as he cried: "Would he do it! You don't know my dad, Nora, or you wouldn't need to ask that." Then his face grew grave and troubled and he added: "But if old Holdbrook is using the ranch to keep Jim steady, he won't sell. If it wasn't for that, I'm sure father

could persuade him to let go. This cattle business is a long way out of his regular line."

Then the Irish girl said thoughtfully: "But suppose that young Holdbrook had not fulfilled the conditions laid down by his father—suppose it was to be found that he had not been going straight this past year—then what would the old man do?"

For some time Charlie Gray did not answer. Long and thoughtfully he studied the girl's face, while she endured his searching gaze without flinching or sign of embarrassment. Deliberately the student rose to his feet and paced thoughtfully up and down before her. Silently the Irish girl waited. At last he faced her with sudden energy. "By Jove, Nora, I believe you've got it. But I don't see," he added doubtfully, "how we could ever manage to work it out."

"Why, sir, 'tis sure I am that the things Dolores said she could not tell me about would be these same Black Canyon doings which 'tis more than like Holdbrook to be mixed up with."

"Yes," agreed the student eagerly. "There's no doubt that the Mexican girl knows all about what's going on."

"Yes, sir, and if Holdbrook was for any reason to turn away from Dolores so that she could see there was no hope of him making her mistress of Las Rosas, 'tis sure the girl would go back to Pablo—the man that she's really loving all the time."

"Well, and what if she did?"

"'Tis like this, sir, as Pablo himself said, 'the love of a woman is a funny thing.' There's no

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woman, sir, likes to be refused by any man—least of all by a man that has won her promise to marry him. Suppose now that for some reason or other Holdbrook was to give Dolores to know that he'd changed his mind and didn't want her? Sure, sir, if I've not mistaken that Mexican girl entirely, she would not be too careful then of what she said about Señor Jim—especially if there was any hope of her getting even with him, by saying it, do you see?"

"Fine, Nora, that's the trap all right—but—"

The Irish girl's sea gray eyes were dancing with mischief. "But where is the bait? Is that what's bothering you now, sir?"

"Yes, how in the world could we ever get Holdbrook to break with Dolores?"

"As for that, sir," she began demurely and paused.

And then all at once the student and the Irish girl laughed.

"But there's so little time, Nora."

"Sure, Mr. Charlie, and when the pot is on the fire and the stew is boiling, it can boil over any minute."

CHAPTER XIV

NORA'S CHANCE

MORGAN and his cowboys riding homeward after their day's work were passing the old adobe ruin when Stub reined his horse close to Curly's side to inquire anxiously: "Be you seein' what I see, or am I plumb locoed all to onct?"

"I'm seein' it all right," returned Curly grimly, "but I ain't a believin' it yet."

Maricopa Bill, with a wicked jab of his spurs jumped his tired mount alongside the others to ask: "What in the name of the prophets do you reckon she means a takin' up with that *hombre*?"

Long Jo, who was riding beside Morgan, said in his low drawling tone: "Looks like that thar Holdbrook person was a makin' some headway. Wonder what's happened to friend Gray?"

Big Boy Morgan made no reply but his face caused the foreman to remember suddenly the young man's father as he had seen him in certain desperate situations.

Pablo, riding alone behind the others, was the only member of the Las Rosas outfit that seemed to find any pleasure in seeing Nora O'Shea and Jim Holdbrook together.

But this was only the beginning. The following

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day when the cowboys were working a herd of cattle some five miles east of the ranch they caught sight of the man and the girl riding along a distant ridge. And every day it was the same. Charlie Gray had developed a sudden interest in the botany of the region and spent the most of his time alone, wandering over the hills while Holdbrook and Nora went for long rides, walked together, or spent quiet hours under the umbrella tree. When Holdbrook was not with Nora, he was with his soldier friends at the post. When Dolores called at the ranch, he always disappeared.

The cowboys made amazing efforts to win the Irish girl's favor and were at no pains to hide their feelings toward the more fortunate Holdbrook, while among themselves they cursed and jeered at Gray for being a quitter. Morgan watched in gloomy silence. Holdbrook was openly triumphant. Wing Foo was desperate.

"What fo you let Holdblook man catch um Missee Nola, Miste Chollie?" he demanded with plaintive earnestness. "Holdblook man him bad—me sabe. Him allee tlime Missee Nola, no good. You allee tlime catch um flowas—no good. You take Missee Nola fo lide—that mo bettee. Pletty quick clowboys hang Holdblook man bly neck—me help likee hell. You mind ol Wing Foo, Miste Chollie—you good fiend my Boss Big Bloy. You watchee Missee Nola—that you job, allee lightee."

Then came a day when Morgan did not go with his riders in the morning but busied himself about the barn and corrals.

Holdbrook had saddled his own horse and was making Sarco ready for Nora when the master of Las Rosas confronted him.

Big Boy made no pretense that he had remained at the corral for any other reason than this; nor did he waste time and words in preliminary conversation. "Holdbrook, it seems to be up to me to tell you that you had better watch your step in this intimacy that you're cultivating with Miss O'Shea."

The man did not speak until he had finished tightening Sarco's saddle girth, then he said coolly: "It strikes me, Morgan, that you are taking a good deal of liberty in saying a thing like that to me."

"You can drop that high and mighty gentleman stuff," returned the ranchman bluntly. "I would a lot rather chance taking liberties with you than to chance the liberties that you are likely to take with the girl."

Holdbrook, controlling himself with an effort except for a sarcastic smile asked: "Has Miss O'Shea appealed to you for protection?"

"She has not. She doesn't know you as well as I do."

"Are you so sure, Morgan, that you know everything there is to know about me?"

"I know enough."

"Well, why don't you tell Miss O'Shea what a dangerous animal I am?"

There was a note of bitterness in Big Boy's voice as he answered: "That would be your way of doing it—I prefer to say what I have to say to you."

"What a virtuous Big Boy it is," sneered Holdbrook.

"You can drop that, too," came sharply from the other.

"Oh, all right—but perhaps you will explain how a matter which concerns only Miss O'Shea and myself happens to be any of your business."

"I'm making it my business."

"So it appears—but why?"

"Because I know what you are, and because Miss O'Shea is my guest. As the boss of this outfit I am responsible."

"Until July first," murmured Holdbrook.

"Until July first," returned Morgan grimly.

"And then what?" asked Holdbrook.

Big Boy Morgan was silent.

"Look here, Morgan," said Holdbrook thoughtfully, "suppose I were to assure you that my intentions toward Miss O'Shea were in every way honorable?"

"Hell!" ejaculated Big Boy. "You don't know what honor means."

"Perhaps I haven't known, but is it inconceivable that I might be learning? Is it so impossible that a woman like Miss O'Shea should teach me?"

When there was no answer to this he continued: "I admit the justice of your opinion of me, Morgan, so far as the past goes. I admit that when I came out here on father's proposition, I planned to stay only long enough to work the old man out of his interest in the ranch and then to cash in on it and get out."

"Jake Zobetser, I suppose."

"Yes, I expected to sell to Jake Zobetser."

"I thought so."

"But all that is changed now, Morgan. I want to settle down and make a home here at Las Rosas. I want to play the game straight. I want to amount to something in the world—to accomplish something worthy the respect of men like you."

"Are you trying to tell me that you are going to marry Miss O'Shea?"

"If she will have me, yes."

It was impossible for Morgan not to recognize the man's sincerity and yet. . . . At last the ranch man asked doubtfully: "Have you said all this to the girl, herself?"

"I haven't dared to tell her quite all—yet."

"But you *have* told her why you are here? She knows about your interest in Las Rosas?"

"Yes."

Big Boy Morgan's face was gray and set as the inevitable question forced itself into his mind. Was this the reason for the Irish girl's sudden interest in Holdbrook? Had the man cunningly tempted her by revealing to her that he, not Morgan, would be the master of Las Rosas? After all, the girl and her brother were of the same blood—was she no stronger, no better, than Larry?

Holdbrook interrupted these bitter reflections with a question: "Morgan, what are you going to do after July first?"

"I don't know, why?"

"I have been thinking—I realize that I am not

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competent yet to manage this business—why can't you stay on and handle the ranch just as you always have? You will still have your interest, you know."

Big Boy Morgan threw up his head and laughed—and in his laughter, as in his manner, there was that same spirit of recklessness which in his father's time had caused some men to feel that the pioneer, John Morgan, was not always safe.

"I don't think I see the joke," said Holdbrook sharply. "What is there to laugh at—I'm making a simple business proposition."

"Business," retorted Morgan. "You poor soulless whelp of a stock-jobbing thief—can even *you* imagine that El Rancho de Las Rosas means nothing but business to me? Me, work for you, here on the ranch that my father and mother pioneered? You have no more right here than one of Zobetser's sneaking horse thieves. Your father stole Las Rosas from me, and you know it. And you have the nerve to offer me a job."

Holdbrook received this outburst coolly. "I guess you know that the law will back father's ownership of the control, all right."

"Oh, the deal was legal enough," admitted Morgan. "I have sense enough to know that. And I'm not squealing because I was caught. I played your father's game and lost. I expect to pay. But I don't intend to stand for your rubbing it in. If you ever mention any more of your business propositions to me, I'll settle your future so damned sudden you won't know how it was done."

Morgan's horse was in the corral, saddled and

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ready, for he had intended to join his cowboys after his interview with Holdbrook. But now instead of mounting, the ranchman removed saddle and bridle and turned the surprised animal into the pasture.

Half an hour later Holdbrook and Nora, as they were starting for their ride, heard the sound of an automobile and looking back saw Big Boy Morgan leaving Las Rosas driving like a madman. Holdbrook laughed. The Irish girl's face was very grave.

But much to the delight of Nora, Charlie Gray, and Wing Foo, Big Boy returned to the ranch that afternoon. As he drove through the big gate and into the shed at the barn Gray went to meet him.

"You're back early," said the student. "What's up—anything gone wrong?"

The ranchman smiled but with a touch of embarrassment. "I just got to thinking things over on my way to town, Charlie, that's all. Then I decided that as long as I was so near I might as well go on in and get the mail. There's a telegram for you."

He handed Gray several letters and a Western Union message.

"No bad news, I hope, Charlie?" he said as the student looked up from the yellow slip.

Gray answered slowly: "It's from dad. Everything is all right at home." He handed the telegram to Morgan, who read: "Holdbrook won't sell now. Wants ranch to reform Jim. If Jim fails to make good his end of proposition by July first we can buy."

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While Morgan was reading the telegram, Charlie Gray sat down on the running board of the car and idly shuffled the letters Big Boy had given him.

For some time the ranchman, with the telegram in his hand, stood with his back to his friend then he turned and sat down beside him.

"So you know, too, do you, Charlie?"

Gray did not look up. "Dolores told Nora."

"I see. And you figured to pull me out of old Holdbrook's clutches by making yourself my pardner, heh?"

"It was Nora's idea. I was afraid it wouldn't work but it looked worth trying."

Big Boy Morgan swore at him affectionately: "You darned old saint, you—and all the time letting me think I was keeping my troubles to myself. I might have known that Irish girl would get it out of Dolores. Some schemers, you two."

"But why didn't you tell me about it yourself, Jack?"

"Why," returned Morgan grimly, "I couldn't see that there was anything you could do, and you came out here for rest. I didn't like to upset you—that's all, Charlie. Your health. . . ."

Gray interrupted him with an odd laugh: "Oh, yes, my health. Jack, I climbed clear to the top of Yellow Jacket yesterday without, as Stub would say, turning a hair."

Big Boy's eyes twinkled. "You *are* a lot better—you have had a good doctor."

"I have," agreed the student heartily. "She made me see that there wasn't anything the matter

with me except ingrowing selfishness. And then made me so ashamed of thinking about myself that I was forced to think of something else in self-defense."

"You're not the only one, Charlie. She showed me up to myself all right. That's what made me come home from town to-day earlier than I had intended. I remembered some things she had said—or maybe hadn't said—I can't really tell how she did it. You know. And—well—town didn't seem so darned attractive somehow. I guess I've lost my taste for—some things."

Gray chuckled. "She assured me some time ago that you wouldn't make a success of going to the devil."

"The devil, she did! Well, she seems to have found a new patient lately. I hope she is as successful with him."

"I hope so too," returned the student dryly.

"I don't mind telling you, Charlie, that it has worried me a lot lately," confessed Morgan. "But I guess it's all right. Jim told me this morning that she knew about the ranch situation and that he intended to marry her, if he could, and settle down. Just at first I thought it might be Jim's Las Rosas prospects that had interested her in him. Then, as I said, I got to thinking it over on my way to town, and I soon saw how wrong I was. She couldn't do that sort of thing, Charlie—she simply couldn't."

Charlie Gray returned earnestly: "You are exactly right, Jack—she couldn't. But I don't think we'd

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better talk about it just now. I wish, if you don't mind, you would tell me how you got into this mess with the old man Holdbrook."

"It was easy enough—for him," returned the young ranchman grimly. "You know my plans for the development of Las Rosas, Charlie—I should say, rather, father's plans. I was only trying to carry out what he started."

"Yes, I remember you went over it all with father and me."

"Exactly. Well, I was rather enthusiastic about how I was going to carry out dad's ideas—you see, I'd grown up on them. And so when I met Holdbrook—the old man, I mean—I talked the whole thing to him."

"Yes."

"Well, Holdbrook was mighty interested—asked a lot of questions—praised me up a lot—younger generation carrying on the work of their pioneer fathers and all that—you know. And then, he showed me how I was foolish to go so slow following out dad's old-fashioned business ideas."

Charlie Gray muttered something that would have made the cowboys grin.

"There's no good cussing," said Morgan. "I've worn myself out trying that."

"Old Holdbrook told you all about modern methods of financing big enterprises, I suppose?" said Gray.

"He did. He showed me how I could develop Las Rosas in a third of the time that dad figured it would take to work it out. It looked good and safe as Holdbrook presented it."

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"Of course," said Charlie. "And then—?"

Morgan answered helplessly: "And then the first thing I knew Holdbrook owned the controlling interest of my ranch."

"Business is business," murmured Gray.

"Sometimes it is and sometimes it is something else," retorted Big Boy Morgan.

"But what will Jim do with Las Rosas if he gets it, Jack? He knows nothing about running a ranch."

"He's supposed to be learning. I've tried to teach him, Charlie. I don't want Las Rosas to go to the devil just because I made a fool of myself. But he's never taken the least interest—spent all his time at Arivaca and at Black Canyon running after Dolores. I knew that he and Jake Zobetser had gotten together, and I figured that Jim would sell to Jake. You can see where that would leave me. Jim admitted to me this morning that I had guessed right. But, as I told you, he says that he has changed his plans now and proposes to settle down and make Las Rosas his home," Morgan finished with a short laugh.

Charlie Gray jumped to his feet and paced nervously to and fro before his companion who sat with his head bowed dejectedly.

"Jack, Pablo has said some things lately—and Nora has somehow gotten a notion from Dolores—do you imagine that Zobetser's outfit is doing anything more than stealing a few cattle occasionally?"

Morgan answered reluctantly: "There's always more or less smuggling—gun running—and that

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sort of thing going on along the border, you know."

"I am asking what you think," insisted Gray.

"Well, Charlie, I'm not exactly a stranger in this section, and you know I'm riding the range most of the time."

"Good enough," declared Gray in a satisfied tone. "And knowing Jim Holdbrook as we do, and considering that he is so intimate with the Black Canyon outfit—"

"Well," said Morgan, "finish it."

Gray pointed to the telegram which was still in Morgan's hand. "Dad says if Jim fails to make good, we can buy back Holdbrook's interest. To make good, Jim must have lived straight. If Jim should get into trouble before July first—"

Morgan shook his head. "It won't do, Charlie."

"It might," insisted Gray. "There's a fighting chance—if you are sure enough about Black Canyon."

"Oh, I'm sure enough about what Zobetser and his outfit are up to. And I haven't a doubt but that Jim is in on it. That's why he is so chummy with the officers at the post—he's keeping Zobetser informed as to the movements of the troops. But it won't do, Charlie."

"Why not?"

"You're forgetting Larry O'Shea."

"My God!" ejaculated Gray. "Would you give up your chance to win back Las Rosas just to save that Irishman?"

"Not on your life," cried Morgan desperately.

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"Not to save ten thousand like him—the poor, weak-kneed, chicken-hearted, white-livered renegade. It's not for what *he* is—it's for what *his sister thinks he is*."

For some minutes after this outburst the friends were silent, then Gray asked thoughtfully: "Is Larry such a bad one, Jack?"

"He's not so bad," returned Morgan. "He's just no good. I can see plain enough, now, how it all happened. As long as Larry was at home under Nora's influence she held him up. A girl like her, Charlie, would hold any man to his best—even Holdbrook. But when Larry came to America, and Nora wasn't near enough to keep him under her thumb, he fell in with the slackers and no-accounts because that's where he naturally belongs. I knew it wasn't right to let him come under Holdbrook's influence, like I did—but I wasn't caring much what happened, then. The only good thing about the boy was his love for his sister, and his wanting to help her, and that made him as ripe for Jim's ideas of getting easy money as I was for the old man Holdbrook's get-rich-quick business schemes."

"You think Jim led Larry into this Black Canyon business?"

"I'm as sure of it as I am that it will kill Nora if she ever finds out what Larry is. That's the tragedy of the thing—don't you see, Charlie? Nora raised this boy. She has been his sister, and father, and mother, all in one. Her love for him is the most wonderful thing I ever saw in all my life, and it's Larry's damned good-for-nothing character that

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makes her love so big. No, no, old man, Las Rosas means a lot to me, but it doesn't mean as much—it *can't* mean as much to me as that worthless, no-account cub, Larry O'Shea, means to his sister."

"I guess you're right, Jack. But she is bound to find out anyway, sooner or later."

"I'm not so sure about that," returned Morgan doubtfully. "If Holdbrook really has changed his plans about the ranch—if he should marry Nora and settle down—well—you can see how it might all work out, can't you? Anyway, so far as I am concerned, Nora is going to have her chance."

CHAPTER XV

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THE work of tallying the Las Rosas cattle was finished. Only five more days and it would be July first.

On the last day of their long weeks of hard riding Morgan told his men the reason for the unusual work. The cowboys received the news that Holdbrook was to be the manager of the ranch in characteristic silence; but among themselves they discussed the situation at length. Long Jo, only, was bitter. But then, El Rancho de Las Rosas and Big Boy Morgan were Long Jo's all—and the man who had put John Morgan's son on his first horse was no longer young.

Stub was in the bunk house laboriously writing a letter. Maricopa Bill, sitting on the floor of the bunk house porch, with his back against a post, was looking at the pictures in a month-old Sunday paper. At the farther end of the porch Curly lay flat on his back "just a-doin' nothin'" as hard as he knew how. Morgan, Long Jo, and Gray were on the ranch house veranda. The rattle of pots and pans told that Wing Foo was in his kitchen, and the Irish girl and Holdbrook were sitting on the bench at the lower corner of the rose garden.

Suddenly the restful quiet of the morning was

broken by Pablo, who was riding toward the house as fast as his horse could run. Gray paused in the middle of a sentence and with Morgan and Jo started for the gate. Bill dropped his paper and got to his feet. Curly sat up. Stub appeared in the doorway.

The running horse, reeking with sweat, with heaving flanks and distended nostrils, stopped in his own length as only a cow horse can and the vaquero without dismounting said: "Señor Morgan, all the horses in the west pasture, they are gone. Not one damn horse is left."

"The fence," said Morgan shortly.

"No, no, it ees not the fence—it ees those Black Canyon thieves. Me, I know it ees so, Señor. It was las' night—the tracks they are all there where they went through the gate on the far side of the pasture. Any one he can see. Me, I trail them straight to the canyon almost to Pete's house then I come back quick like hell."

Big Boy looked at his foreman.

"It was to be expected—if you ask me," said Long Jo. "Injun Pete, he savvys the situation and figgers that just now is a good time to help himself. He's got 'em in that little pasture above the house where the canyon boxes. Ain't no way anybody can get to 'em except on foot, without passing through the corral in front of Pete and his whole outfit. He'll let 'em lay there to-day and move 'em over the line to-night." The foreman turned toward the listening riders. "Get your horses, boys. Pablo, you'd better saddle a fresh one."

He started toward the bunk house as he spoke but Morgan stopped him. "Wait a minute, Jo."

The foreman faced his young employer questioningly. Big Boy Morgan was clearly embarrassed. "Just what do you propose to do, Jo?"

"Do? Go get our horses, of course—what else is there to do?"

Morgan glanced toward Nora and Holdbrook, who had been attracted by the excitement and were now standing on the veranda at the corner of the house. With an effort he said slowly: "Not this time, Jo."

The cowboys hurrying from the bunk house buckling on their guns as they came were just in time to hear Morgan's words. They stopped in their tracks and looked at one another in questioning amazement. Then they saw Nora standing there and understood.

"It's that ornery Larry O'Shea again," growled Curly under his breath.

"Big Boy, he's sure in one high old jam this trip," returned Maricopa Bill.

"Sh-h," whispered Stub. "Shut up an' watch Long Jo's play."

The Las Rosas foreman was apparently trying to understand Morgan's words. "What be you meanin' by 'not this time?'" he asked slowly.

"I mean that you are not to go to Black Canyon."

"We ain't goin' after them horses?"

"Not now."

Long Jo deliberately scanned the faces of the little

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audience as though mutely inquiring if they had heard this astounding thing. Carefully he studied Big Boy Morgan's countenance as if half suspecting a joke. "You ain't meanin' that you're goin' to let that Black Canyon outfit run off a bunch of our horses without you doin' anything? Didn't you hear Pablo say that he'd trailed 'em straight from our pasture gate to Injun Pete's house?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"We can't do anything about it this time, Jo."

A low laugh came from Holdbrook, and Big Boy Morgan whirled as if stung, but as he faced the man and the girl, who were standing side by side, he checked himself and turned with an appealing look to Gray.

The student moved closer to the ranchman and Long Jo to say in a tone which could not be heard by the two on the veranda: "I suppose the Black Canyon crowd understands how we feel about Nora and Larry and are taking advantage of their protection."

"That's it exactly," returned Morgan bitterly. "Holdbrook, of course, has explained it to Pete, who would never dare try anything as raw as this ordinarily. They're banking on our not doing anything because Larry is with them."

"But, Jack, isn't this exactly the chance *you* want?"

"I don't think Jim is in on this horse stealing, Charlie. More likely this is Injun Pete's own private venture—sort of on the side, you know."

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"Yes," returned Gray eagerly, "but it gives you an opportunity to go after the whole Black Canyon outfit and once you have started something Jim's connection with them could be easily established."

"Yes, but—" he looked toward the girl on the veranda. "No, no, Charlie, I can't do it." He turned to the foreman: "We'll just have to let it go this time, Jo," he said in a tone that was heard by all.

The old ranch foreman's lean, dark face was set grimly, his eyes were hard as gray steel and his voice was as hard. "You're the boss, sir, but I sure never thought I'd see the day that John Morgan's boy would show up like this—and all for a measly, no 'count—"

"Jo!" Big Boy spoke with sharp authority, and the foreman in spite of his anger checked the words that were on his lips. "All right, sir, all right. But you've got to hear me just the same. I ain't mindin' about tellin' a few reasonable lies to save somebody's feelin's. I can make out to get along with the work when the boss goes plumb loco, an' every fool puncher in the outfit is a moonin' around like a sick calf. But when I got to jest sit down an' look on while Injun Pete an' his rustlers help themselves to a bunch o' Las Rosas horses without even sayin' please er thank you, I'm through. They used to take some pains to cover their tracks. Now, they jest ride up an' drive 'em away through the gate like they'd paid for 'em. They'll be askin' you to deliver your stock at their corral next. The only way I can figure it is that you ain't no son o'

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yer father's, sir, an' you ain't Mollie Grayham's boy, neither. You're jest some sort of a damn throw back to something long before their time."

Big Boy Morgan hung his head. The cowboys looked down at the ground. Holdbrook was smiling. In Nora's face there was wonder, shame, sympathy, and pity.

"Go easy, Jo," protested Charlie Gray, "you don't quite understand."

But the old foreman who had lived through so much with Big Boy's pioneer father, retorted: "I'm understandin' a heap more than you'll ever know, Mr. Gray. I'm understandin' now how it comes that the son of John Morgan can turn El Rancho de Las Rosas over to a white-livered, sneakin' dude sport from Philadelphia what don't know a steer from a nanny goat. I've heard a lot o' wild talk here an' there in my time, but I ain't neaver heard nobody intimate that there was ever any good in lettin' a measly squaw man an' a bunch o' lowsy horse thieves tromp all over you while the pie-faced coyote that legs for 'em gives you the laugh. Why, sir, this here will make me an' the boys the joke o' every cowman and puncher from Nogales to the Grand Canyon an' from West Texas to the Colorado River."

There was an odd smile on Jack Morgan's boyish face as Long Jo turned his back and stalked away. When the foreman disappeared in the bunk house, Big Boy, without a word, went to the shed where he kept his automobile. The others were watching curiously as though wondering what would happen

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next, when suddenly with a little cry the Irish girl started forward and ran across the big yard toward the barn. Morgan was backing the car out of the shed when she reached him. She put her hand on the door at his side, and he was obliged to stop.

"Excuse me," he said, and she saw his face drawn and gray, "I don't wish to be rude, but I've taken about all I can stand."

Her eyes flashed. "Sure, 'tis that you've taken more than any man has a right to take unless 'tis the truth that Long Jo was speaking."

"What do you care whether it's the truth or not?"

"I'm caring enough that you've got to tell me—Why is it that you won't go after those Black Canyon thieves like a man should?"

He turned his face away and reached for the gear shift.

She put her hand on the wheel. "Not a foot will I let you go until you've told me."

"I have a good reason," he muttered desperately.

"A good reason, is it?" she cried scornfully. "'Tis no good reason that can make you turn your back on men like Long Jo and the boys and go running away to town for the drink."

He looked at her curiously. "What does it matter to you?"

"It matters enough that I'm here shaming myself before them all," she retorted.

He glanced back at the men who were watching them.

"If you'll not go yourself to keep the name of Las

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Rosas honorable before men, you can at least let Long Jo and the boys do the thing that will keep them from being laughed at from one end of Arizona to the other. Being afraid to play the man yourself don't give you the right to make better men share the disgrace."

He was stung by her words as she meant him to be. Shutting off the motor he faced her squarely and a mocking, reckless devil looked out of his eyes.

She caught her breath and moved back from the car.

He laughed. "You are entirely right, Miss O'Shea, I hadn't realized how it would look to you. I could stand Jo's dressing down because he knows and the boys know. But you—pardon—you have a lot to learn yet."

He got out of the car on the other side and leaving her standing there went to the corral.

The Irish girl followed and watched him as he caught and saddled a horse. "Mr. Morgan," she called as he swung into the saddle, "Mr. Morgan."

A laugh was his only answer as he passed through the gate on the other side of the corral.

A moment later the men at the house saw Morgan riding down the hill from the corral.

Curly called to the foreman, and they all stood watching Big Boy as he opened the pasture gate and loped easily across the little valley toward the gate on the other side.

Long Jo muttered a puzzled oath and started to meet Nora, who was coming toward the house. The others followed.

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"What's happened now?" Long Jo demanded as he met the Irish girl.

"Sure, he didn't tell me a thing where he was going or what for—only laughed when I asked him."

"Laughed, did he? Huh! And what had you been sayin' to him, miss?"

The girl was calm but in her eyes there was a great fear as she told them briefly what she had said to Morgan.

There was a shadow of a grim smile on Long Jo's lean face. "So you figgered Big Boy Morgan was afraid, did you?"

"Oh, sir, please tell me what have I done—where has he gone?"

"He's gone to Black Canyon to get them horses. What would you expect him to do after your a throwin' it into him like that? Without even a gun on him, too, an' he jest laughed an' said nothin', did he? Uh-huh—"

Gray spoke quickly: "We'd better saddle and catch up with him, Jo. We can't let him go alone."

"It won't do, Mr. Gray. If he'd wanted us he'd said so. I've seen him like this before. He's jest like his daddy was. When he's this way there ain't nothin' to do but jest give him his head. We'll get ready to ride though."

The cowboys ran to the corral. Quickly the horses were saddled. The foreman mounted.

"Pablo, you'll come with me. We'll try an' trail along an' see what happens. But God help us if he catches us at it. You boys stay right here. If I want you I'll send Pablo to the top o' the ridge

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yonder to give you the signal an' you come a runnin'."

An hour passed. Gray and the cowboys watched the ridge beyond the valley. Nora would have remained with the men but the student persuaded her to go to the house. When Holdbrook came to the corral for his horse, he was told curtly that if he wished to go anywhere he could go afoot. Upon his demanding an explanation they informed him that they were not taking any chances.

Another hour. Suddenly the watchers saw two horsemen coming over the distant ridge. A moment they were in sight then they disappeared again in a hollow between the hills. Again they appeared for a moment on the summit of a near ridge and again they disappeared.

"It's Long Jo and Pablo," breathed Stub.

"They sure ain't losin' no time," murmured Curly.

"It's a darned good thing they ain't got another quarter of a mile to go," added Maricopa Bill as the approaching horsemen crossed the valley. "Them horses ain't got another hundred yards o' run left in 'em."

As the riders gained the corral and leaped from their horses the foreman said curtly: "Get your saddles off an' get to the house, quick. He's got them horses an' is a comin' home with 'em. Took 'em single handed, by hell! Damndest thing I ever see in all my life. Move, can't you! He mustn't find us here like this. Goin' to stand there yappin' like a bunch o' school marms 'til Big Boy catches

you at it? If he finds us all set like we was aimin' to horn in on his game, he'll jest naturally up an' clean the whole outfit."

When they reached the house, Nora and Holdbrook were under the umbrella tree. "Yes, ma'am," said Jo, in answer to her anxious question, "Mr. Morgan, he's all right. He'll be along with them horses after a bit."

"He's all right and safe, you say?" cried the girl. "God be praised! If he'd gone and got himself hurt all on account of me saying what I did, I'd felt like a murderer the rest of my days. You're sure he's all right, sir?"

"Didn't appear to be even scared," returned Long Jo dryly.

"How did he work it, Jo?"

"For heaven's sake, tell us about it."

"Didn't Injun Pete an' his rustlers try to stop him?"

"Warn't there nobody on guard?"

Long Jo looked proudly from Gray to Nora and Holdbrook and then grinned triumphantly at the eager riders. He addressed himself to the girl. "That thar Black Canyon, miss, boxes about a half mile above Pete's cabin, which is in a narrow neck like. An' up the canyon above this neck the walls are mighty high, straight up an' down. Ain't no possible way fer a horse er a steer to get in er out, you see, 'cept through the gate right in front o' the cabin—an' it was in there that they had the horses, jest like Pablo figgered.

"Well, sir, me an' Pablo, we follows Big Boy until

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I see for sure he was makin' fer the upper end o' the canyon an' then I left Pablo where he could see my signals an' get a good runnin' start fer you boys if it was needed an' got off my horse an' found a good place on the rim above the house where I could watch the show an' maybe make a play, if it was called for. I could see the horses all right, pretty well up toward the head o' the canyon. An' I could see Pete an' his gang loafin' 'round down at the house. An' then I caught sight o' Big Boy. He'd left his horse an' was climbin' down into the canyon. He looked kind o' funny like, an' at first—bein' at that distance—I couldn't jest make out what it was. Then I knew—the son-of-a-gun was packin' his saddle on his shoulders. The gang at the house couldn't see what I could from up above, you understand. They couldn't see the horses, even. An' bein' as how they figgered nobody could git into that pasture without ridin' in front o' the house, they wasn't worryin' none.

“Big Boy, he made it down them rocks all right—though how he did it with that saddle I'll never tell—an' then I could see him a-workin' along easy toward the horses. Pretty soon he'd got the bunch into a corner like agin the canyon wall an' when they was dodgin' past, he hung his rope on one. He picked that bald-faced sorrel.”

“Hornet,” said Stub, under his breath.

“Quickest an' best broke cow horse in our whole outfit,” added Curly.

“You bet yer life!” murmured Bill.

Long Jo chuckled. “Big Boy sure needed a good

one if ever a man did. I've seen some wild doin's in my time—I've seen John Morgan, in the old days, take chances that warn't human—but I never would 'a' believed any man born o' woman could be such a plain reckless fool as to try what I could see Big Boy was fixin' to do. Lord, how he did make that Hornet horse come alive once he'd got him saddled an' was on him. He was on all sides o' that bunch every minute an' quicker'n I can tell it, here they went down the canyon toward the gate an' the house an' the whole Black Canyon outfit. Gentlemen, hush! I'm tellin' you, my back hair felt like it war a-raisin' straight up.

"Well, sir, from up where I was it looked like Pete an' his crowd was plumb paralyzed fer about a minute. An' that minute was jest long enough fer Big Boy to get the gate open. You should 'a' seen that Hornet horse work. The audience woke up about the time the leaders was through the gate an' began shootin'. But they was too rattled to do any good, I reckon, 'cause Big Boy went on down the canyon fannin' them horses fer home. Soon as I saw he was safe an' I could make my legs work, I beat it back to Pablo an' we jumped down the mountain to git here ahead o' him.

"An' here he comes now?" Jo finished pointing to the band of horses trotting down the hill on the other side of the valley.

Silently they watched as Big Boy turned the recovered animals into the pasture. Silently they waited as the young ranchman approached the house after leaving his own mount in the corral. Not a man

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moved, but the Irish girl went slowly forward to the gate as if to meet him. He passed her without a word. Chastened and subdued, they waited for him to speak.

"Jo," he said coolly, "there are three horses down there in the pasture that belong to the Black Canyon outfit. Have them brought up to the corral, and see that Mr. Holdbrook takes them home."

"Yes, sir," returned Jo and then as Big Boy Morgan disappeared in the house, he added mournfully: "An' I called him a throw back—throw back, hell! He's John Morgan all over."

Holdbrook, whose face was pale with anger and, it may have been, with something else, went to Nora and engaged her in a low-toned conversation. But it was only a moment until the Irish girl's voice was raised to such an indignant pitch that the men under the tree heard distinctly.

"Indeed, and 'tis you, sir, that should take shame to yourself for your thieving Black Canyon friends."

The man's reply was inaudible but that it did not mend matters was evident.

"What I don't know is no matter—I know enough. 'Tis sure I am that when Saint Patrick drove the snakes out of Ireland one of them came to Arizona."

Whereupon Nora disappeared into the house, and the man went hurriedly toward the corral.

Long Jo said quietly to the grinning cowboys: "You all heard what the boss said about them Black Canyon horses, didn't you? I reckon we'd best be movin'."

CHAPTER XVI

"'TIS BETTER TO LAUGH THAN TO CRY"

NORA O'SHEA had listened with varied emotions to Long Jo's account of Big Boy Morgan's reckless adventure. The Irish girl keenly regretted the things she had said which apparently had sent the young ranchman on his dangerous mission, but she was glad that he had gone. She admired his courage and gloried in his success, but several troublesome and, to her, ominous questions persisted. She could not understand why Morgan had at first refused to permit any move to retrieve the Las Rosas' horses and then, when he had changed his mind, why he should have gone alone.

The girl knew from Gray of Morgan's belief, that Holdbrook was associated with Zobetser and his Black Canyon outfit. She knew from Gray and from Holdbrook, himself, of the latter's plans with Zobetser to join the two ranches in one large organization. She, too, had seen instantly Morgan's opportunity to cause the arrest of Indian Pete and his riders, with the possibility of connecting Holdbrook with the lawless Black Canyon organization and thus saving Las Rosas from Holdbrook and Zobetser. When Big Boy, in the face of all this,

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had without a word endured Long Jo's scathing arraignment rather than make an attempt, even, to save his inheritance, the Irish girl had been beside herself with shame for the man she had so idealized and with anger that he could so tamely submit, not only to the loss of the horses, but to the humiliation before his men. She was ashamed, now, of herself because she had doubted him.

But while Nora could not understand Morgan's action, she did see that the spirit of recklessness which had led Big Boy to answer her taunts with such a hazardous adventure was the same spirit which had been leading him in the hopelessness of his trouble to the reckless excitement of his wild parties. In fact it was this same element in the young ranchman's character which had made him the victim of the Holdbrooks and was in the way of delivering him into the hands of his father's enemy, Jake Zobetser. The very spirit which had enabled the pioneer, John Morgan, to win Las Rosas against the fearful odds of his day, had led his son to risk his inheritance itself in his efforts to carry on and develop the work his father had bequeathed to him. As Max Drayton had said that day in the Old Pueblo Club, Big Boy was like his father, but these times are a lot different.

But in spite of her regret that she had permitted herself to question Big Boy's courage or his loyalty to Las Rosas, the Irish girl was happier than she had been since she had permitted the apparent friendship between herself and Holdbrook. The men of Las Rosas, too, showed the heartening effect

of the incident. The depression of the cowboys caused by the coming change in the management of the ranch vanished before their pride in Big Boy's startling exhibition of those qualities of manhood which men of their type most appreciate and admire. His single-handed triumph over the traditional foes of Las Rosas was their triumph. They gloried in the humiliation of the Black Canyon outfit. Charlie Gray was jubilant. Wing Foo was hilarious. Morgan, himself, apparently, was in a somewhat happier frame of mind which, no doubt, accounted largely for the good spirits of the others. It is quite certain, too, that the little scene between Holdbrook and Nora which the men had witnessed did not detract from the general cheerfulness of the outfit. Pablo, only, was not so cheerful. He brought his guitar that evening when the men asked Nora to sing, but Gray, at least, thought that the vaquero's heart was not in his music.

The following morning, while the cowboys were busy with some odds and ends of work at the corrals and in the near-by pastures, and Morgan was occupied in the house with his account books and papers, Nora, with washtubs and clothes basket not far from the kitchen door, was doing the weekly wash. Every week the men had protested against her doing this work, but the Irish girl had insisted with: "But I'm telling you, boys, there was never a Monday since I was big enough to reach the tub that I have not done the like; and there's no reason at all why I should not be making myself useful now. Besides 'tis a pleasure to be making things clean."

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And Charlie Gray, as he saw her this morning, thought that the Irish girl certainly lost none of her charm because of her homely task.

The student, in chaps and spurs and wide-brimmed hat, had been out with the cowboys and had ridden to the house with some message to Morgan from Long Jo.

Wing Foo hailed him from the kitchen doorway. “You wait littee bit, Miste Chollie, me catch um egg-nog fo you.”

“You go to thunder with your egg-nog,” retorted Gray while the Chinaman and the girl laughed.

“Miste Chollie him holla like hell evly tlime me tell him egg-nog now, Missee Nola. You clome catch um dlink pump, Miste Chollie, that mo bettee.”

“I believe I will, Wing, now that I am here. You see, ma’am,” he added whimsically to Nora as he went to the pump, “that thar water at the corral ain’t somehow agreein’ with me lately an’ I ’lowed as how I’d best try this here at the house fer a spell.”

“Go on now. ’Tis you that’ll be losing your job, whatever it is, if you don’t be getting back to it.”

Gray lifted high the tin cup of water. “Well, here’s looking at you, Nora.”

“Thank you, sir—drink hearty.”

“Ah-h-h, me sabe what mattee Miste Chollie, Missee Nola,” said the old Chinaman with a sly grin. “You clome stlay Las Losas, him catch um mo happness—catch um mo happness make um mo well.” With a shrill cackle of laughter he retreated into his kitchen.

"Do you know, Nora, I believe Wing is right," said the student seriously, as he left the pump and went to stand beside the wash tub, "I'm beginning to think that half the sickness in the world is caused by the want of a little happiness."

"And what a pity 'tis, sir, when it costs so little and is worth so much that everybody can't have enough to keep them healthy."

"That being the case, Nora," returned Gray with his quiet smile, "may I speak to you about something—just as your own brother would speak if he were here."

The Irish girl wiped the suds from her arms and resting her hands on the edge of the tub regarded him gravely. "Indeed, sir, and you are free to say what you will to me. Do I not know the heart of you? 'Tis not Larry himself that I would listen to quicker."

"Thank you, Nora. Do you realize that there are only two days more before Holdbrook takes charge here?"

"Yes, sir, bad luck to him. I wish I was as sure of heaven as I am that he has no right to be taking Las Rosas away from poor Mr. Morgan."

"I believe as you do about that, Nora, but we don't seem to be able to prove it, and so Holdbrook will take possession of the ranch just the same. What I wanted to ask you is this: Do you know what you are going to do? I am assuming, of course, that you won't care to stay here after Morgan and I leave. Have you any plans?"

The girl's eyes filled. "Oh, sir, Mr. Charlie,

I’m that frightened when I think of it that I could die. Oh, why don’t Larry come. Every night I’ve prayed God to bring him to me before Holdbrook’s time. And every morning I’ve told myself this day he must come without fail. And I believe yet that he will come, sir. He must.”

“There, there, Nora,” murmured Gray as one would quiet a frightened child. “Something has delayed Larry a little—that is all. You must not be afraid. Tell me, how are you off for funds?”

“What’s that, sir?”

“Have you plenty of money?”

“Is it money!” she laughed through her tears. “Sure, I had only two dollars and some pennies left when I got off the train in Tucson.”

“I was afraid that might be the case,” returned Gray. “Now listen to me, Nora, you’re not to worry another minute about what you are going to do. You’re just going to let me take Larry’s place until he comes. And you’re going to trust me to take care of you exactly as you would trust him. Do you understand?”

“God bless you, sir, I—I—”

“God did bless me when he sent you to Las Rosas,” returned Gray quickly. “You see I have always wanted a sister; and if I could have had exactly the one I wanted, she would be exactly like you, Nora O’Shea.”

The Irish girl was drying her eyes with one corner of her apron. “’Tis you that’s getting to be great with the blarney, Mr. Charlie.”

"There is no blarney about it. You simply don't realize what you have done for me, Nora."

"And you're not wanting to die any more?" she was smiling now.

"Die!" The man of too many books stretched up his arms, threw out his chest and drew a long full breath.

The Irish girl laughed. "Oh, but 'tis a great thing just to be alive, now isn't it, sir?"

"It is that," agreed Gray heartily. "But here comes Curly, Nora. Mind now, you are not to worry another minute about what's to happen when the ranch is turned over to Holdbrook—*sabe?* 'Tis your brother Charlie that will be lookin' after you."

"God love you, sir, 'tis a wonderful brother you are."

"Long Jo's a-waitin' fer you, Mr. Gray," grinned Curly on his way to the pump. "We all figgered something musta *dee*-tained you at the house, er else you'd fell off yer horse somewheres."

"I'm on my way, Curly. *Adios*, Señorita Nora."

Wing Foo appeared in the kitchen doorway. "Looke—looke, Miste Chollie," he pointed toward the cowboy at the pump. "Allee ttime missee Nola washee, washee, clowboys allee ttime clome house fo dlink. Whattee mattee you, Cully—you no got wolk to do, heh?"

"We'll have to move the laundry to the other side of the house, Wing," laughed Gray.

Nora was bending over the tub rubbing vigorously. "Go on with your teasing, you two."

Wing Foo retreated to his kitchen, and Gray rode away.

Curly growled menacingly: "That there Chinaman is gettin' plumb locoed lately—about women."

The busy girl did not speak and the cowboy coming to the other side of the tub said in a happier tone: "Gosh, but it's been great havin' you here, Nora."

Wringing the water from a garment, the Irish girl smiled at him, and the rider grinned sheepishly. "Just a seein' you 'round the place like this makes a man feel good."

"You'd better be feeling more like work, Curly my boy," she returned briskly as she applied the soap to another garment.

But the cowboy continued: "It used to be that I liked best to ride the range, but now I'm almighty glad when there's something to keep me 'round the home ranch."

"Sure, and 'tis Long Jo that'll be making you glad if you don't be going back to your job."

"Don't you worry about that," returned the rider easily. "I don't mind lettin' Long Jo enjoy himself. He ain't got only two days more, you know."

"What a pity it is," sighed the girl.

The cowboy shifted his weight to the other foot uneasily: "Nora—"

"Yes, Curly."

"I don't want you to think I'm a hornin' in on anybody's business nor nothin' like that but—"

"No, indeed, Curly."

"Of course you know, me an' the boys seen how

you run that there Holdbrook person off your range yesterday."

"Yes."

"Well, ma'am, we was a talkin' it over amongst ourselves last night after the singin', an'—well—what I want to say is—what be you aimin' to do come July first?"

"I don't know, Curly. 'Tis hoping and praying I am that Larry will get back in time."

The cowboy looked everywhere but at the girl. "I know, ma'am, but suppose—just supposin' something should turn up an' keep your brother from bein' here when Holdbrook takes charge?"

The Irish girl could not answer.

The rider suddenly found a quiet dignity. "I know I ain't much, Miss Nora, an' I've lived sort o' careless like up till you come. Since then I've got to feelin' more responsible. I ain't got nothin' laid by yet, but I'm strong and healthy an' there's always a job for a top hand if he's willin'. There couldn't no man love you more, nor fight for you quicker, nor work for you harder—if you could only just see it that way—could you?"

"God bless you, Curly, and 'tis a man you are that any woman should be proud to love. But love is a queer thing, Curly, and I can't—not the way you mean."

"I was reasonably sure you couldn't," said the rider mournfully. "Fact, when I sized myself up, I couldn't see how you could. But I just thought I'd take a chance. And, anyway, you understand how me an' the boys are standin' ready to do any-

thing we can for you, don't you, ma'am? We ain't wantin' you to feel that you're left alone even if Larry shouldn't get back. You'll tell us any way we can help, won't you?"

The Irish girl was about to reply when the cowboy's quick ear caught the sound of a step, and he turned abruptly to face toward the end of the veranda. The next instant Holdbrook appeared.

"O—ho," cried the newcomer with a knowing smile, "our lady of Las Rosas has help, I see."

"She has," snapped Curly. "Is there anything you was wantin' perticler?"

"Not from you, Curly."

"That's too bad now, ain't it?" drawled the cowboy insolently. "I was a hopin' I could do something for *you*. Well, good-by, Miss Nora. I reckon I may as well be ridin'." He strolled leisurely toward his horse.

"I'm just starting for town," said Holdbrook, moving toward the girl. "I'm riding over to Arivaca and will motor in from there with Lieutenant Wilson. Can I do anything for you?"

"No, thank you, sir," she was again bending over the tub.

The man watched her a moment, then he cried indignantly: "It's a shame for a woman like you to be slaving this way for these dirty brutes. You'll do no more of it when I'm in charge here."

She looked up at him innocently. "And are you thinking of doing the boys' washing yourself, sir?"

"You know what I mean, Nora."

She stood erect and looked him straight in the eyes. "Miss O'Shea, if you please, sir."

"Oh, all right—I beg your pardon, Miss O'Shea. But if you only knew how miserable and unhappy I am you would— Won't you forgive me for what I said yesterday?"

"Why, as to that, sir, I'm thinking I might be giving you a bit of good advice."

"Advice?"

"'Tis just this, sir—if you would be happier, you would do well just to be the kind of a man that would not be making you so miserable as you are."

This was too much for the man's patience, and he was about to make an angry retort when Pablo appeared suddenly around the corner of the bunk house.

With his sombrero in hand the vaquero bowed low. "Excuse, Señorita Nora—dis man, Holdbrook, he make you bother, heh? You no like what he say, no?"

"It is none of your damned business whether she likes what I say or not," snarled the enraged Holdbrook.

Pablo faced him coolly. "It ees the damn business of every man at Las Rosas what ees said to la Señorita Nora. You no like me to ask, no?"

"I'll show you what I like the first of the month."

"Mebby it ees that you will show me what you like—mebby it ees that I show you dis." The word was accompanied by a movement almost too quick for the eye to follow and in the Mexican's extended hand lay a wicked looking gun.

The subtle point of the vaquero's deliberate insolence—as Pablo himself understood it—lay in the fact that he did not draw or hold the weapon in a threatening manner but merely exhibited it as an object of possible interest. But Holdbrook was in no state of mind to appreciate the delicate restraint of Pablo's art. His jaw dropped, his face was ashy, his frightened eyes were fixed on that gun as if held by an awful fascination.

The spell was broken by a sharp command from the Irish girl: “Pablo, put up that gun!”

“*Si*, Señorita. It ees nothing. Me, I think Señor Holdbrook, he like for see one good six gun. She ees damn fine gun, Señor—long time now I use him. Sometime mebby I use him some more.” He slowly returned the weapon to its holster and turned to the girl. “Dis *hombre*, Holdbrook, he think he run El Rancho de Las Rosas pretty quick now, Señorita. Mebby it ees pretty quick he not run Las Rosas—mebby it ees pretty quick that he run some ranch in hell.” He bowed low as he backed politely away. “Excuse, Señorita Nora, please.”

“The Saints keep us, I thought sure the boy was fixing to shoot. If I were you, sir, I would just be going to town while I could.”

Jim Holdbrook silently and speedily acted upon the Irish girl's advice.

For another hour Nora continued her work uninterrupted save for an occasional word from Wing Foo, who now and then came to the kitchen door to see if his beloved Missee Nola wished for his assist-

ance. Pablo, who was on the bunk house porch industriously sewing a leather patch on his chaps and making other badly needed repairs in his personal equipment, made no conversational advances, and Nora, while she felt curiously that the vaquero had some purpose other than his ostensible occupation for remaining in the vicinity, did not encourage him to speak. But the Irish girl had by no means given audience to the last of her little court. Quite casually Maricopa Bill and Stub happened by and being thirsty stopped to visit the pump.

The old Chinaman scolded from the doorway: "What mattee you bloys, heh? You no work. Clowbloy dlink um pump dly pletty quick, what we do then, heh? Missee Nola, she no want see you."

Nora's face was rosy with something more than the effect of her exertion. "Oh, leave the boys be, Wing—'tis that hot and dusty this day."

"Ah-h-h. Catch um plenty dlink in collal. Me sabe what mattee clowboy, Missee Nola."

When Wing Foo had withdrawn from the doorway the two riders awkwardly approached the girl at the wash tub.

"You better keep an eye on that thar Chink, Nora," advised Stub. "He's rarin' jealous, I'm tellin' you."

"You bet yer life," agreed Bill solemnly.

Bending low over the washboard, the girl kept her eyes on her work.

The short cowboy looked up at his tall companion and the older rider in pantomime urged him to proceed.

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With a painful effort Stub said: “We all are sure proud to have you with us, Nora.”

She glanced up. “You, too, Bill?”

“You bet yer life.”

Stub continued, with the air of a schoolboy not too sure of his memory: “We used to rather be out somewheres a ridin’ the range, but we’re allus glad now when there’s something to do nearer the house.”

Bill’s response was a husky murmur: “You bet yer life.”

The Irish girl’s sea-gray eyes were shining with merry appreciation.

The short cowboy grew stronger: “It sure is good for a man, Nora—jest a seein’ you around like this—makes him feel like—like a man.”

“You, too, Bill?”

“You bet yer life.”

Stub cleared his throat and slapped his leg with his quirt. “You sure done a lot for us, Nora, a-washin’ an’ a-mendin’ our shirts an’ things—an’—well, we all been a-figgerin’—”

“Bill?” said Nora gently.

“Yes, ma’am, that’s right—you bet yer life.”

Stub finished desperately with explosive force: “My God Almighty, Nora, ain’t there nothin’ we can do fer you when that ornery Holdbrook gets to be the boss o’ Las Rosas?”

“God love you, boys,” cried Nora, “there was never a girl had such friends. If there should be any need, you may be sure I’ll come to you as freely as I would go to my own brother Larry. And now if you’ll be so kind, you can just carry off this tub of

dirty water for me—and that'll be all for now. Thank you both."

The cowboys gazed at each other sheepishly, then hurriedly they grasped the tub.

"Yes, miss."

"You bet yer life."

But before the riders, with their burden, could get from sight behind the bunk house Pablo shouted derisively: "That's fine job for top hand cowboys!"

And Wing Foo, who stood grinning in the kitchen door, cried in shrill mockery: "Bly an bly clowboy catch um job washee, washee, Pablo."

"Beats playin' the geetar," roared Bill.

Stub pulled at his side of the tub: "Come on, you old fool."

"Pretty quick now I ride that bad horse for you, Stub," called Pablo. "You want him nice gentle like lady's horse, heh?"

"I'll gentle you," yelled the rider. And the cowboys, with the tub, disappeared around the corner of the bunk house followed by the laughter of their Mexican and Chinaman tormentors.

"Shame on you, Pablo, and you, Wing, to be teasing the boys," cried Nora.

The *vaquero*, leaning against the corner post of the bunk house porch, rolled a ciagarette. "You no tease them cowboys, Señorita Nora, oh-h-h—no!"

When the midday meal was over Nora brought a basket of mending to the shade of the umbrella tree where Charlie Gray lounged contentedly after a table performance which had fully merited the applause of the delighted Wing Foo. Stub, Curly

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and Maricopa Bill were lingering near the pump and Pablo, in front of the bunk house, was talking with Gray.

"And what are you two conflabbing about now?" smiled Nora. "Sure, you've grown to be as thick as two thieves."

"Where is the boss, Nora?" asked Gray with a laughing glance toward the men at the pump.

"Is it Long Jo or Mr. Morgan that you mean? They're both of them right around the corner of the house there. And have you no work to do this day, Pablo?"

"Si, Señorita, I work this day. Me, I ride bronco horses. Only one more little one I have to ride now then I finish. I think I come an' make little music on guitar for you then—what you say, heh?"

"I'd love to have you, Pablo."

"Si, all right, I play little for you now."

He entered the bunk house and a moment later reappeared in the doorway with his guitar just as Morgan and Long Jo came into view.

Big Boy and his foreman were finishing a conversation, and with the last word Long Jo started for the corral while Morgan came on toward the two under the umbrella tree. Then the boss caught sight of the riders at the pump. "And say, Jo," he called.

The foreman halted and looked back. "Yes, sir."

"You'd better carry plenty of water along. It will take you nearly an hour to go to the south pasture and back. The boys might get thirsty."

"The outfit does seem sort o' feverish to-day," returned Jo.

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The three cowboys vanished behind the house and Morgan, himself, went to the pump for a drink.

Pablo put his guitar carefully inside the door. "I think better I go ride that little bronco horse right now, Señorita Nora. Pretty quick, by and by I make the music."

"I'm thinking you'd do well to be getting back to your job," laughed the girl.

"Misse Nola, Misse Nola," called Wing Foo from the kitchen door. "Lookie—lookie! Boss Big Bloy, him allee ttime dlink too, allee samee clowboy, hah."

The Irish girl bowed her head low over her work and Charlie Gray rose hurriedly. "I think mebbly so, better I go help Pablo ride that bronco horse. Excuse, Señorita Nora, please."

Morgan, coming to the umbrella tree, stood looking after his friend who was laughing with the vaquero as the two went toward the corral.

"Charlie is like a new man since you came to us, Nora."

"Arizona is a wonderful climate, sir," the girl returned soberly.

"I don't think it is altogether the climate that has helped Charlie."

"No? Maybe, sir, 'tis the eggs."

The big ranchman smiled down at her thoughtfully. "You like Arizona, don't you, Nora?"

"Indeed and I do, sir. The sky is so big and wide and blue, and the country is so—so—well—whichever way you turn you can see as far as you can look, and the mountains are like—like dream

mountains, with their colors never the same, sir, and the air all so clear and sweet with the sunshine. Oh, yes, sir—’tis any one would like Arizona—I think.”

Big Boy sat on the edge of the table toying with the things in the sewing basket. “And do you like us, too? The Arizona people, I mean?”

The color came into the Irish girl’s cheeks. “Sure, and how could I help it when you’re so like your country. ’Tis any woman would be liking you, I’m thinking.”

Morgan said gravely: “It must all be very different from Ireland?”

“Oh, yes, and I love my old home, too,” she cried eagerly. “We were very happy in our little cabin in Kittywake, sir, in spite of our poverty and all—with the father dead and the mother always so sick. ’Twas Larry, you see, that made us forget the hard things. Faith, the boy kept me so busy while he was growing up that I had no time for sadness. And you know yourself what a fine man he has come to be. Would not any woman be happy with the likes of such a brother that she’d raised herself?”

“Yes, indeed, Nora.”

“I want you to know too, sir,” she continued proudly, “that even if we were so poor and sometimes hungry, there was never any kind of a black mark against the name of O’Shea. There’s no gentry in the world, sir—neither lord nor king nor president that the O’Sheas can’t stand beside and hold up their heads with for honesty.”

A sudden move of Morgan’s brushed the work-

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basket from the table and with a muttered apology for his carelessness Big Boy went down on all fours to retrieve the scattered things. As he replaced the basket on the table he said slowly: "But aren't you ever homesick, Nora? Wouldn't you like to go back to Ireland?"

"Oh, no, sir, not now. And how could I be homesick with you being so kind to me?"

Big Boy thoughtfully pulled several yards of thread from a spool and began carefully rewinding it. "Nora—"

"Yes, sir."

"There is something I have been wanting to tell you. I—"

The Irish girl's trembling hands dropped her needle. "Yes, sir?"

"I—I want to have a talk with you."

"Yes, sir, I'm right here, sir."

The ranchman looked slowly around. "It is only two days now until Holdbrook takes possession of Las Rosas, Nora."

"I know, sir—bad luck to him and his kind."

"It was hard enough to lose the old place before you came. But now I—"

"Oh, sir, please you'll not be giving up yet. 'Tis many a time the old devil himself has stubbed his toe just when he was about to grab some poor soul."

"But there doesn't seem to be anything for Holdbrook to stumble over."

"If only Larry was here."

"I wish to God he was!" cried Big Boy so heartily

that the girl's eyes filled in gratitude for his sympathy.

“I feel so sure Larry could do something to help, sir.”

“There's nothing that any one can do, Nora. I'll just have to get out, that's all. Even if Holdbrook would let me stay, I couldn't—I love the old place too well.”

“And the old place loves you, sir—but where will you be going?”

“I don't know, Nora.”

“Well, 'tis Larry that will be going with you wherever you go.”

“Larry go with me, Nora?”

“Sure, the O'Sheas never desert their friends in time of trouble, sir. You'll believe that.”

“But you, Nora, what will you do?”

“Why—why, sir—I—I'm an O'Shea, too.” The red flamed in her cheeks, and she buried her face in her hands. “Oh, why don't the boy come back? What is it that's keeping him when we need him so?”

Big Boy leaned toward her across the table and awkwardly put out his hand toward her shoulder. “Please don't, Nora. Larry is safe enough.” The hand was withdrawn suddenly, and the man sprang to his feet with an exclamation.

The Irish girl raised her face. “You'll forgive me, sir, 'tis well I know that tears will not help you with your troubles. Sure, if they would I could give you an ocean of them.” She smiled: “But don't worry, sir, I won't.”

"Nora, I—I want to tell you something—but—"

"Yes, sir?"

"But I—I don't know how."

"Sure, you might make a try at it, sir."

"I—I'm afraid—"

"Faith, if 'tis too bad we can both of us run."

"It's been wonderful to have you here at Las Rosas, Nora."

"And 'tis been as wonderful to be here, sir."

"You know I—I've lived most of my life with men."

"'Tis easy to see, sir."

"Of course, there were my school days."

"Of course."

"But there has been no woman at Las Rosas since mother."

"I know."

"And so—well—since you came I have been thinking a lot."

"Sure, 'tis a lot you've had to think of—I mean, with Holdbrook going to take your ranch—and the Black Canyon thieves stealing your horses—and Larry gone—and—and me here."

"I never realized before, Nora, what a woman like you could be to a man."

"As for that, sir, I've noticed that a woman can be several different kinds of things to a man—it mostly depends on the man."

"With Holdbrook taking the ranch it means that I must start all over."

"Yes."

"Of course, I'll have some interest, but it won't be

worth anything under Holdbrook's management and Jake Zobetser's scheming. So I can't say to you, Nora, what I would if things were not in such a mess. But I want you to know that I—that if I could—I mean if it was right for me to—”

A shrill yell came from the direction of the corral and out from behind the barn, through the gate, into the big yard in front of the house shot a bucking horse with Pablo in the saddle. Charlie Gray on horseback followed. As the black bronco, with his head between his stiff fore legs and his back arched, plunged here and there in his furious efforts to unseat his rider the man of books encouraged the Mexican with wild whoops. “Yip—yip—ye-o-ow! Stay with him, Pablo—stay with him. Ride him, cowboy, ride him!”

Nora exclaimed with fear: “Oh, sir, make them stop. Tell him to get off. Sure, the poor boy will be killed, please, sir.”

Morgan laughed. “Pablo is all right, Nora. The horse doesn't live that could throw that boy. It's all in the day's work. You watch now.”

And sure enough—the black, four-footed demon, pitching, sunfishing, corkscrewing across the yard, suddenly stopped within a few feet of the fence where Morgan and the girl stood and with his head between his knees, his ears flat and his mouth open, bawled his surrender.

The grinning rider called to the girl: “What you think for my little black horse now, Señorita Nora? You like for trade me Sarco for him, heh?”

“'Tis a wonder you are, Pablo.”

Charlie Gray rode up to the fence. "Did you see it, Jack? Did you see the show, Nora? Wow! But that black devil went up twenty feet every jump."

"God love us," cried the Irish girl laughing. "Don't be telling me, sir, that Mr. Charlie was ever sick."

"It must be the egg-nog," returned Morgan; and Pablo, joining in the laugh, cried proudly: "Señor Gray, he be *bueno vaquero* some time pretty quick soon. Me, I teach him."

When Pablo and Gray rode back to the corral Morgan went with them.

And then, presently, the Mexican returned to the umbrella tree alone. "By damn, Señorita, that little black horse he bronco," said the *vaquero*, removing his sombrero and wiping the perspiration from his face. "Pretty near he pile me."

"But you rode the beast though, Pablo," cried the girl, her face beaming.

"*Si*, Señorita, I ride him. Pretty near, two, three time, I think mebbly he ride me."

The Mexican passed on into the bunk house, and a few minutes later reappeared with his guitar. The Irish girl now stood at the fence watching Morgan and Gray, who were riding over the hill beyond the big gate. So intent was she that she did not notice Pablo's return. For a moment the Mexican watched her. Then seating himself on the edge of the porch with his back to the corner post and his eyes still on the girl, he softly touched the strings of his guitar.

"'TIS BETTER TO LAUGH THAN TO CRY"

She turned quickly: "Oh, Pablo!"

"What ees it, Señorita Nora? What ees happen to you? Your face it ees all what you call shine so. All same you got lamp on your insides, heh? la Señorita is happy, yes?"

"Happy is it! Oh, Pablo, I'm that happy I could fly."

"Like bird, heh? If you can fly, you can sing. La Señorita will sing? I play for you that song you all time sing for cowboy. You know—last night you sing him—she go like dis." He played the melody of a song that Nora had often sung for the Las Rosas men and the Irish girl, with happy smiling face, sang:

When the blue devils swarm all around you
And the life that yer livin' is hell;
When the saints ye have prayed to protect you
Seem to be off their jobs for a spell;
When the world is that black wid disaster
That ye swear it wad be sweet to die
Sure 'tis then that ye'll need to remember
That 'tis better to laugh than to cry.

For a smile will go farther, my darlin',
Than a fist full of jewels and gold;
'Tis the hearty guffaw and the merry ha-ha
Keeps this old world from growin' *too* old.
A heart filled wid mirth is the salt of the earth
But there's no good at all in a sigh;
So ye'll not be forgettin', mavourneen,
That 'tis better to laugh than to cry.

The old divil can do but his worst, my dear,
As the saints can do only their best;
If ye laugh when yer hurt and don't worry,
Sure the Lord will take care of the rest;

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All the angels above do be smilin'
On the one who can make troubles fly,
So ye'll heed me, dear heart, and be cheery
For 'tis better to laugh than to cry.

"*Bueno*, Señorita. Me, I think that ees damn good song. That song she make for be happy. Cowboys no sing much 'fore you come—sing all time now. It ees good for sing, Señorita."

"I'm glad if the boys like my song, Pablo. And does Mr. Morgan, maybe, sing it too sometimes?"

"Señor Morgan las' night when you sing—I think he like to try. But—well—it ees not everybody that can sing with the mouth what ees on the insides. Me, I sure Señor Morgan all time sing your song in his heart, Señorita Nora."

"Do you really think so, Pablo?"

"Sure— *Me*, I know. You want me tell how I know, Señorita?"

"Tell me, Pablo."

"All right. It ees because I—wait—I know. You sing your song for me. I will sing little song for you, and my song she will make you to understand' how it ees I know Señor Big Boy ees sing your song in his heart. My song what I make, she go like dis." Again his fingers swept the strings of the guitar.

Cuando la luna resplandece en la mesa,
Y la paloma en el arbol su amor está cantando,
Lejos está me corazón de Las Rosas
Porque un sueño que mi amor me am' estoy soñando.

"Now what you think, heh?"

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"Ah, but 'tis a beautiful song, Pablo. I don't know a thing what it means at all; but I—sure, and it sounds just like I feel."

"You no understan' the word, but you know how it feel, heh? *Bueno*—that ees good. It ees jus' so, Señorita, that I know how Señor Morgan sing your song in his heart when I can no hear the words."

"Sing the words so I can understand them, Pablo."

"All right—I sing him now so you hear de words, if I can."

When the moon shines bright on the mesa,
And the dove make his love in our old pepper tree,
Then my heart ees not here at Las Rosas
For I'm dreaming a dream how my love she love me.

The last word floated away with the sweet tones of the guitar. The Irish girl sat motionless, her eyes fixed on the distant sky line of the Serritas. At last she said gently: "And your dream is a true dream, Pablo, my boy. 'Tis well I know that Dolores loves you in spite of her fooling with Holdbrook."

"*Si*, me, that ees what I know jus' like I tell to you, Señorita. But my Dolores, she no come back to me. Every night I wait at the old ruin where we make our love—she no come. An' now I have see how you stop Holdbrook from make the love to you because it ees Señor Morgan that you love. Ees it not so?"

"I think, if you don't mind, Pablo, I'll be telling that first to Mr. Morgan himself."

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"*Si*, Señorita, and Señor Morgan he has the love for you, heh?"

"Mr. Morgan has not told me that yet, Pablo."

"No? Mebby it ees that he no speak the words, but me, I know. It ees all the time in his face—in his eyes. Me, I think sometime to love ees no good."

"Sure, Pablo, it is always good to love."

"Me, I am not so sure. To have love ees to have all the time trouble—nothing but trouble."

"Oh, Pablo, but there's no trouble in the world like wanting love and not having it."

"*Si*, mebby it ees so—me, I only know that I love. Señorita Nora, why you think Señor Morgan no let Long Jo an' the cowboys catch the Black Canyon thieves when they steal Las Rosas horses, heh?"

"Mr. Morgan went after the horses himself."

"*Si*, but for why did he do nothing to catch the thieves? Señor Morgan, he know dis man Holdbrook ees one with the Black Canyon outfit. If Señor Morgan let us catch the thieves, then would Holdbrook be caught, too, an' so he would not take Las Rosas from Señor Morgan an' from me my Dolores. Ees it not so?"

"Sure, Pablo, I can't understand it at all, and the more I think of it the less I know."

"*Si*, but la Señorita Nora ees understan' how if Señor Morgan do not want Holdbrook to get Las Rosas then he mus' what you call arrest the Black Canyon thieves pretty quick—ees it not so?"

"That is what I believe, Pablo."

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“That ees what la Señorita only think—heh? Me, that ees what I *know*.”

“Do you really know for sure, Pablo, that Holdbrook is one of that thieving Black Canyon crowd?”

“*Si*, Señorita, me, I know for sure as hell. You think Pablo ees all time sleep, heh? No, no—my love for Dolores it ees so great it keep me sometime awake. It ees me, Pablo, that know how the automobiles they go in the night from Tucson to the Black Canyon. Sometime it ees by the Nogales road an’ the Sopari that they go. Sometime it ees by Paso Robles an’ the Altar Valley. It ees in the night, too, that the men with the pack mules go from Black Canyon across the line into Mexico. Sometime the men with the pack mules they go by the way of California Gulch—sometime it ees by Tres Bellotas—sometime by San Fernando or Sasabe or some other way through the mountains. But all the time it ees in the night. An’ all the time when the men with the pack mules go the soldiers that watch the line they are that night at some other place. What for you think Holdbrook ees make such good friend with soldier, heh? Me, I know. It ees Holdbrook that all the time tell to Injun Pete where the soldier will be so that the men an’ the pack mules they do not go that way—*si*, Señorita—it ees so. If Señor Morgan will arrest the Injun Pete an’ his Black Canyon band, then will Holdbrook be arrest too, an’ so he will not get El Rancho de Las Rosas. An’ if Holdbrook ees not get Las Rosas, he no can take from me my Dolores.”

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"And you're sure, Pablo, that Mr. Morgan knows this that you're telling me?"

"*Si*, Señorita, me, I tell it to him myself."

"And what did he say, Pablo?"

"The boss, he say for me to keep the mouth shut on what I know. *Si*, an' for so long as I think Señorita Nora ees let Holdbrook make the believe love with her so that my Dolores will come back to me like I say, then I keep the mouth shut. But now Señorita Nora ees not let Holdbrook make the love to her an' so to save my Dolores I do not keep the mouth shut. Me, I will tell to you, Señorita, why it ees that Señor Morgan he no want to catch the Black Canyon thieves an' Holdbrook. It ees because of Señor Morgan's great love for Señorita Nora."

"Pablo! Sure 'tis worse than Mexican you're talking to me now. What do you mean?"

"If Señor Morgan an' his Las Rosas cowboys catch Injun Pete an' his band, they will send them all to the prison—ees it not so?"

"Of course, Pablo—and a good job it would be."

"*Si*—but if Señor Morgan an' the Las Rosas cowboys send the Black Canyon thieves to prison, they will send your brother Larry to prison too. I think Señor Big Boy Morgan, he no like to do that, Señorita Nora."

For a moment the Irish girl was as one stricken by a physical blow. Her eyes closed, her face was pale as death, and she seemed about to fall. "Mother of God!" she gasped. "What's this you're telling me?"

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"It ees so. If Señor Morgan catch the Black Canyon thieves then will he catch your brother Larry, too."

"Pablo!"

"*Si*—it ees so, Señorita. Larry he has been all the time at Black Canyon."

"'Tis not true! Sure I am that my brother Larry—the boy that I raised as if I was his mother as well as his sister—would never be taking up with such thieving company. 'Tis you that do be joking with me, Pablo!"

"No, no, Señorita—you shall see I speak true. Señor Morgan, Señor Gray, Long Jo—all the boys they know it ees so. They all time lie to you that Larry is away on business. They do not want you to know. Everybody loves la Señorita Nora—me, I love my Dolores."

"Oh, Larry, Larry," moaned the Irish girl. "Is it true, my boy? Can the like of such a thing be? No—no—Pablo, man, you're wrong—'tis all a black mistake."

"No, Señorita, excuse please, but it ees not mistake—it ees so. Me, I no like to tell—to make la Señorita Nora feel so bad—but my love for Dolores it ees so big it make me. Señor Morgan an' the boys, they all time say if some one tell la Señorita Nora about her brother Larry, they kill. Mebby it ees so. I no care much. If Holdbrook gets Las Rosas an' takes from me my Dolores, then maybe it ees that I kill some, too. But if la Señorita Nora should make her brother Larry go away from Black Canyon so that Señor Morgan would not have to

catch him, too, then could we take the thieves an' Holdbrook would not get Las Rosas an' then would my Dolores come back to me."

"Pablo!"

"La Señorita Nora does not want Holdbrook to take away Las Rosas from Señor Morgan that she love, no?"

"No—no."

"An' me, I do not want Holdbrook to have Las Rosas because it ees for that he will take from me my Dolores, that I love."

"'Tis to that Black Canyon place I must go, Pablo! I must go to my Larry boy."

"That Injun Pete, he is one bad *hombre*, Señorita."

"'Tis no matter—I must go to Larry."

"If Señor Morgan an' the boys know, they will not let you go."

"Mr. Morgan and the boys must not know, Pablo. No one must know. 'Tis you that will help me because of your love for Dolores."

"An' if I help you—you will make your brother go away off somewhere quick?"

"That I will."

"Larry, he will do what you say when he know the love of you with Señor Morgan, heh?"

"Larry will do what I say for love of me, his sister that's raised him, Pablo."

"Si—me, I think by damn that ees so. All right, Señorita, it ees me, Pablo, that will help you to go to the Black Canyon so that no one shall know. You will do jus' what I say, heh?"

"Yes—yes—"

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“*Bueno*, that ees good—You shall say to Pete that you come to make little visit to Dolores who have come so many time here to see you, heh? So that Pete he will not think you know of the automobiles an’ the men with the pack mules in the night? You *sabe*, Señorita?”

“Yes, I understand, Pablo.”

“*Bueno!* An’ if you be careful in that Black Canyon, Señorita, then you shall see your brother, too, an’ you shall tell to him that he mus’ go away for the love he have for you—ees it so?

“An’ you, Señorita, shall make the whisper to my Dolores how dis *hombre*, Holdbrook, he ees not any more to be the boss of El Rancho de Las Rosas—an’ you shall tell to her how me, her Pablo, ees wait for her at the old ruin where we make our love an’ the plan how together we will go to the priest.” The *vaquero* suddenly caught up his guitar. “Sh-h, Señorita—the cowboys they come. Be careful, they must not know—sing, Señorita, sing—”

He touched the strings and the Irish girl, throwing up her head, sang bravely:

For a smile will go farther, my darlin’,
Than a fist full of jewels and gold.
’Tis the hearty guffaw and the merry ha ha
Keeps this old world from growing *too* old.
A heart filled with mirth is the salt of the earth
But there’s no good at all in a sigh;
So you’ll not be forgettin’, mavourneen,
That ’tis better to laugh than to cry.

CHAPTER XVII

BLACK CANYON

JAKE ZOBETSER'S Black Canyon ranch—that is the ranch house and the corrals—was some eight miles from Las Rosas. The canyon, itself, is little more than a deep gorge some three miles in length with precipitous walls and, except for the boulder-strewn water course, with a fairly smooth floor. It is a quarter of a mile wide at its mouth, narrows to a width of perhaps two hundred yards, and then widens again to form the rock-walled basin in which Big Boy Morgan had found the Las Rosas horses. Through this narrow neck or passage the creek holds close to the west wall which rises sheer above the little stream. The big gate and the corrals were on the opposite side of the creek on the floor of the canyon with the ranch house standing several feet above on a bench or flat which was backed by the precipitous east wall.

The corrals were rudely fenced with small logs and brush in a most primitive fashion. There was no barn, but only a shelter made of poles with a thatch of bear grass. The house was little more than a cabin, or hut, made of adobe with a dirt roof, a dirt floor, and a *ramada* or rustic arbor, built like a porch across the front. Jake Zobetser had

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never wasted his money in buildings on his Black Canyon place because he looked forward to the time when he would add the Morgan property to his holdings and the buildings at Las Rosas, so advantageously and so beautifully situated, would be ample for the needs of the larger outfit. But even had he chosen to erect more pretentious structures he would scarcely have built in Black Canyon. There were in the many miles of mountains, hills, and valleys of Zobetser's ranch too many sites that were suitable, more roomy, convenient, and accessible for the ranch headquarters. For Indian Pete and the riders who, under his leadership, looked after Zobetser's cattle and whatever other interests the owner may have had in that general vicinity, the Black Canyon place was quite sufficient. Indeed, for those other interests, it would have been difficult to find a location more ideal.

Indian Pete was a grizzly-haired, unshaven, dark-faced, hard-eyed creature of that mongrel type which seems to combine the viciousness of several breeds with the distinctive virtues of none. He had been in Zobetser's service many years. There were those among the Tucson fathers who asserted that Indian Pete even knew Zobetser's history. But that was pure conjecture, based upon the fact that they both first appeared in southern Arizona about the same time, and that as little was known of the one as of the other.

It was the forenoon of the day following Pablo's revelation to Nora of her brother's connection with the Black Canyon outfit. Pete, sitting on a rude

bench near the cabin door in the shade of the *ramada*, was repairing a saddle girth. At the farther end of the porch-like arbor, where she could look past the corner of the cabin and down the canyon, his squaw was sitting on the ground weaving a basket. Save for the shrill cries of some bluejays that were quarreling in the oaks and sycamores below the house and the mournful notes of the doves that came to water in the corrals, the silence of the place was unbroken. High above the top of the canyon wall a black spot floated in the deep blue, wheeling in leisurely circles. A raven winged his grave way across the gorge. A gray lizard sunned himself on a gray rock at the head of the path which led from the house down to the corral.

Then Dolores came out of the cabin and went to the *olla* which hung on one of the posts of the *ramada*. The man looked up from his work. And as he watched the girl there was in his hard, close-set eyes an expression of speculative suspicion. Presently he said in a gruff tone: "Well, kid, day after to-morrer an' you'll be hookin' up with Jim Holdbrook an' goin' to live in that thar grand house at El Rancho de Las Rosas."

"*Quien sabe?*" returned the girl with a shrug of her shoulders. Then, as she leaned listlessly against a post of the *ramada* with her gaze fixed on the opposite rim of the canyon she added: "It ees anything that can happen before the day after to-morrow ees come."

The man put the saddle girth aside and there was a hint of a threat in his voice as he said: "You ain't

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been an' worked up a quarrel with Holdbrook, have you?"

Dolores spoke quickly: "No—no—"

"You're still good friends with him?"

"Si."

"You'd better be, if you know what's good fer you," growled Pete. "I've done took notice, though, that he ain't been here to see you so mighty much since that thar Irish gal come to live at Las Rosas—spends most of his time with her—from what I hear."

The girl turned to face him. "And how ees it that you make so sure this Señor Holdbrook ees inten' to make of me the Señora of El Rancho de Las Rosas? Me, I do not know it ees so."

"We've got his promise, ain't we?"

"Si, but what ees a promise to one like heem. To get what he want for to-day a man like heem would promise anything for to-morrow. When to-morrow ees come—then we will see."

"You don't need to worry none," returned Pete harshly, "that *hombre* is sure goin' to keep his promise this time, all right 'cause I aim to see that he does. You ain't run across Pablo, lately, have you?"

"No."

"You've been runnin' over to Las Rosas mighty frequent, I notice."

"It ees to see Señorita Nora that I go. I have not one time the talk with Pablo."

"Don't you know that Irish girl is a tryin' to take Holdbrook an' Las Rosas away from you?"

Dolores laughed scornfully. "Señorita Nora try

to take Holdbrook? No—no—it ees not such a man like as Jim Holdbrook that la Señorita Nora would try to take from anybody. It ees some one else that Señorita Nora could love—it ees a man that ees beside Holdbrook like the Yellow Jacket Mountain ees beside one of those leetle hills what the ant makes. Holdbrook, I theenk, he might like to have Señorita Nora—she ees so beautiful—jus’ as he would like to have me—jus’ as such a man like heem ees want every woman that he see. That ees to be expect. But such a woman like la Señorita would not have such a man. No, no, not if he was boss of a thousan’ ranch the same as El Rancho de Las Rosas—not if he was the las’ man in the world.”

“Looks to me like you was thinkin’ a heap about this here sister of Larry O’Shea.”

“Si, me, I love la Señorita Nora—she ees all the time talk to me the mother talk such as I never before have had. All the time she ees make me to understan’ that the happiness it ees not jus’ to have things. All the time she ees make me feel what I know in my heart ees true—that there ees so much more in life than jus’ things. All the time she ees make me to see more an’ more how for the woman the love it ees everything.”

“Looka here, my lady!” retorted Pete angrily. “You jest fergit all that sort o’ stuff an’ keep your grip on Holdbrook an’ Las Rosas er it’ll be the worse for you. I didn’t take you an’ keep you an’ raise you up to what you be now all fer nothin’. We’ve got this here *hombre*, Holdbrook, right where we

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want him an' don't you go makin' any fool breaks—
You hear me?"

"*Si*, me, I hear," returned the girl bitterly. "You take me when I leetle baby an' my father an' my mother they die; an' you keep me 'til I am something that men want. It ees jus' like you keep the Black Canyon cows and horses. An' jus' like you ship the cattle to the market when they are ready—so you will sell me to any one who will buy. *Si*, me, I understan'."

"I was afraid that thar Irish gal was a-workin' on you," retorted Pete. "You can't tell me she ain't got her eye on Holdbrook an' Las Rosas. She's a-makin' a fool out o' you."

Again Dolores laughed. "No, no, it ees not la Señorita Nora that ees make the fool of me. It ees me that ees make the fool of myself."

As the man was about to reply the squaw, from her place at the other end of the ramada, called in Spanish in a low monotonous voice: "Some one comes."

Pete made an angry, commanding gesture and the Mexican girl obediently went to the corner of the cabin to see who was approaching. After looking down the canyon she returned to the man.

"He ees coming now," she said.

"It's time he was gettin' here," growled Pete. "Mind you're good to him or—" he paused significantly.

Dolores went on into the cabin and a few minutes later Jim Holdbrook appeared coming up the steep path from the floor of the canyon.

"Hello, Pete."

Zobetser's lieutenant returned the greeting with a surly grunt.

Holdbrook looked about. "How is everything?"

"All right."

"The stuff arrived without trouble last night, did it?"

"Sure."

Holdbrook laughed. "The soldiers were over in the Altar country looking for something to come through around Sasabe—except the lieutenant—he was with me."

"You was in Tucson last night, I reckon?"

"Of course."

"See Zobetser, did you?"

"Certainly, I shook the lieutenant long enough for that."

"Did Jake send any word?"

"Only what you already have—that the stuff must be forwarded to-morrow night without fail. The boys have to go by California Gulch again this trip. The soldiers will still be over around Sasabe. Where is everybody?"

"The boys are out scouting around. I sent the Irishman to the stone house yesterday. He ought to be back any time now."

"Dolores at Las Rosas again?"

"No, she is in the house making herself pretty fer you."

Holdbrook smiled. But there was no answering smile on the hard face of Indian Pete. "It's all right with you an' yer father. is it?" he asked.

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"You sure goin' to own control of the Morgan ranch come day after to-morrer, be you?"

"Sure thing, Pete. I had a letter from the old man yesterday and saw his lawyer in Tucson. Everything is fine and dandy."

"Good enough—an' how about Dolores?"

Jim Holdbrook hesitated, and it was evident that he was not wholly at ease. Zobetser's man, watching him, waited.

"Look here, Pete," said Holdbrook haughtily, "I'm not exactly wanting to buy a woman to live with me at Las Rosas, you know."

"Oh, you ain't! Maybe you're a thinkin' you can get that Irish girl without paying for her, heh?"

"You can leave Miss O'Shea out of our talk, if you please," returned Holdbrook coldly.

"Is that so—well you can figger if your Miss O'Shea finds out how it was you that got her brother into this here business with us she'll be leavin' you out almighty sudden."

"She'll never know anything about it. I talked that all over with Zobetser yesterday. When I take charge of Las Rosas day after to-morrow Larry goes back to the ranch. One more shipment, and we will quit this game for good; Jake and I have some mighty big plans, Pete, once we get hold of Las Rosas."

"You have, have you—an' what about me?"

"Why you are to be the ranch superintendent, just as we always said."

"Oh, so I'm still going to have a job, be I—an' you'll be givin' my gal Dolores a job, too, I reckon, heh?"

Again Holdbrook's uneasiness was manifest, but he was saved from the necessity of carrying the conversation further by Dolores herself who appeared in the cabin doorway. At the same moment the squaw's impassive voice came from the other end of the *ramada*: "Some one comes."

Indian Pete growled in Spanish to the Mexican girl a warning threat and went to the corner of the cabin to see who was approaching. One look and a volley of mingled Spanish and English oaths came from his snarling lips.

Holdbrook started in fear. "What is it, Pete—what is the matter?"

But the Black Canyon man was saying sharply to the squaw: "Look carefully to see if there is any one else." When the keen eyes of the pair had searched the canyon, and the squaw, with a negative grunt signified that whoever was approaching was alone, Pete returned to his seat on the bench.

"It's that thar Irish gal from Las Rosas," he growled with another oath. "She ain't got no business comin' here—specially to-day. You be mighty careful—you two. This here's mighty likely to mean trouble."

"I'd better go," said Holdbrook hurriedly. "I'll slip down back of the house to my horse and make for home." He was starting around the rear of the cabin when Indian Pete spoke sharply.

"No you don't, mister, you're goin' to stay right whar you be. You've done come to visit Dolores—*sabe?*"

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Holdbrook hesitated, drew himself up as if to resent the other's tone and manner, then, apparently concluding that this was no time for an argument, obeyed Pete's gesture and seated himself beside the cabin door.

Dolores ran forward to meet the Irish girl at the head of the path.

"Oh, Señorita Nora, ees it that you have come to see me at las' after so many time I go for veesit with you to Las Rosas?"

"Sure, and wasn't I always telling you how I'd be surprising you some day."

"It ees for me such happy surprise, Señorita."

Nora was looking curiously around the wild and forbidding retreat. "So this is your Black Canyon—and a queer place it is. Sure, I don't know whether I am in this world yet or some other."

"But tell me," cried the Mexican girl, "how ees it, Señorita Nora, that you come? How ees it that you know the way? Thees place, where I live, it ees not so easy to find, no?"

"'Twas my horse, Sarco, that brought me, of course. Just as Pablo said he would."

"Pablo?"

"Sure, 'twas Pablo come with me as far as the right road, do you see. And there he told me to just follow straight on until I come to the road that branches off into the canyon which I was to know by the two walls of the canyon standing up into the sky. 'And when you turn your horse into the canyon,' he told me, 'just lay the reins on his neck, and Sarco will take you straight to the place—'

which he did—'til he stopped at your barnyard gate down below. Not being able to fly I climbed the rest of the way up by myself."

"But why ees Pablo send you here, Señorita?"

"Sure, nobody sent me at all," protested Nora. "Pablo just fixed Sarco and told me the way. You see, darling, there was nobody at home but Pablo and Wing Foo, and I was so lonesome, and 'twas such a fine day, that I just made up my mind to come to you." She paused with a significant look toward Holdbrook. "Of course, if I had known that you had company—"

Dolores spoke quickly: "No—no, Señorita—Señor Holdbrook, he ees no matter—come." She led the Irish girl forward. "Thees ees Señor Pete—you know."

"'Tis pleased I am to meet you, sir," said Nora with quiet dignity. "Sure, I've heard of you often enough since I came to Las Rosas."

The man acknowledged the introduction with a bow and an unintelligible mutter.

The Irish girl turned to Holdbrook. "Finding you here is a pleasure I did not expect, sir. I thought you were in Tucson."

"I was," returned Holdbrook easily, "but I returned to Arivaca this morning and rode over here to call on Dolores. You say there was no one at the ranch when you left?"

"No, sir, the boys and Mr. Gray all went with Mr. Morgan over to the east *mesa*, except Pablo. They'll not be home 'til late, Mr. Morgan said as they were leaving."

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While Nora was giving her attention to Holdbrook, Indian Pete spoke to Dolores in Spanish, and the girl immediately invited the unwelcome caller into the cabin. "Come, Señorita, come—our poor leetle home ees not like Las Rosas, so beautiful, but come, you shall see—please."

As the door closed behind the two girls, Pete and Holdbrook moved away from the cabin and stood near the head of the path where they could see down the canyon.

"Look here, Pete," said Holdbrook hurriedly. "We've got to get her out of the way before Larry comes."

Indian Pete looked at him sharply. "What for?"

"Because if she ever gets at that poor weakling, she'll make him tell all he knows."

An evil grin parted the thin lips of the squaw man. "An' that wouldn't be helpin' your chances with the gal a little bit, now would it?"

"You can forget that," retorted the other. "If Nora O'Shea ever gets hold of her brother and makes him talk, she'll send us all over the road—Zobetser and the whole outfit. She's just that kind, and she'll have plenty of backing."

"Ye-a—too bad you didn't figger on this sister business when you got that no 'count Irishman in with us, ain't it?"

"I got Larry because Zobetser wanted another man and because it tickled him to take one of Morgan's hands away from him. Nobody knew the boy's sister was going to land in this country so soon. But that's all past—what we have to do

now is to see that he don't give us all away, as he will if she gets hold of him."

"There he comes now," said Pete pointing down the canyon."

"All right," said Holdbrook, "you go on down to the corral and keep him from coming up to the house. Find some excuse to send him off somewhere in a hurry, and then I'll take the girl home."

Indian Pete looked his companion over with a contemptuous leer. "Oh, you will, will you? And so you're actually figgerin' you can drop me an' Dolores out of your big plans without so much as a thank you ma'am, be you? We're jest to forget all your fine promises to make Dolores mistress of El Rancho de Las Rosas, be we? I'm to have anything you an' Zobetser take a notion to hand me, am I—like you'd chuck a bone to a cur dog. I don't know how you come by all them grand ideas, mister, but I'm a tellin' you you'd best get shet of 'em right here an' now. That Irish gal ain' a goin' nowhere *with you*. She's goin' to stop right where she is fer a spell 'til I get ready to say where she goes. An' if you don't like my way of doing business, why, blast your yeller hide, start something!"

The young man, who came up the path from the corrals to meet Indian Pete and Holdbrook a few minutes later, was not, in his appearance or bearing, one to inspire the confidence of any person at all accustomed to judging characters. Physically, he was of medium height and strong, but the set of his shoulders revealed him as one of those unfortunates who habitually look too much at the ground. His

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face was rather more weak than bad—with that surly, furtive, hang-dog, apologetic expression which is common to those who follow evil ways, not from deliberate choice, but because it is their nature to go the way of least resistance.

Nora O'Shea, from the abundance of her own strength of character, had unconsciously supplied her brother with that which he himself lacked. Without realizing it, she had dominated him. He, in his weakness, had leaned so easily on her strength that she had never realized how dependent he was upon her. Her love—the love of sister and mother combined—had caused her to give herself to him so without reserve that she was blind to the fact that the very virtues which in him she so idealized, she herself had supplied. When separated from his sister's strength, the boy had fallen easily under the influence of any leader that chance had thrown in his way. And chance is never slow to supply leaders for all Larry O'Sheas. As Big Boy Morgan had suggested to Charlie Gray: It was not what this young man *was* but, rather, what his sister, Nora, believed him to be that made the tragedy of the situation. It was the very magnitude of the Irish girl's love, with her splendid spirit of self-sacrifice and her capacity for idealizing the object of her love that had made her brother such a ready victim of all those influences which Nora herself so abhorred and against which she had shielded him. That was the tragedy.

But with all this brother's readiness to accept the teachings of any one who offered—with all his willing-

ness to follow any leader—there was one thing to which he held fast—his love for his sister whose affectionate guardianship had been so largely the cause of his weakness. In this love alone he was strong. And because this was the one thing in which he never failed he clung to it desperately—so desperately, in fact, that he made it to himself his justification in following the ways from which she would have held him back. Lacking, always, strength to resist, he made the strength of his love an excuse for yielding. And this, too, is tragedy.

The young man approached Indian Pete and Holdbrook with the air of an inferior appearing before his acknowledged masters.

“’Tis all right, sir,” he said in answer to Pete’s question. “They’ll be ready at the stone house to receive the stuff to-morrow night.”

“What happened that you didn’t get in by sun-up, like I told you?” demanded Pete.

“Why, sir—I don’t like to be always ridin’ in the night—’tis that lonesome alone. An’ the boys said I would be doin’ just as well to start after havin’ breakfast with them—which I did.”

“Too bad about you bein’ lonesome,” sneered Pete. “Did you meet up with anybody on the way?”

“Not a soul, sir.”

“Stopped to climb Yellow Jacket an’ have a look at Las Rosas as usual, I reckon?”

Larry flushed and looked everywhere but at the two men.

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"Did you see your sister?" asked Holdbrook sharply.

The young man started and looked wildly around. "No, sir—no, sir—an' why do you be askin' that?"

"Ain't you seen yer sister nowhere since she come to Las Rosas?" demanded Pete.

"No, sir—I have not—only at a distance. Before God, sir, I would not be doin' a thing like that."

"Why not?"

"'Tis me that's told you why," cried the Irish lad desperately. "It would be sure death to my sister, Nora, if she was to know—" he hesitated, "if she was to know that I'm not workin' for Mr. Morgan, like she thinks." Then he found courage to add: "Only for the one thing, I'd have left this country the minute I knew she was come. But Mr. Holdbrook here, he's promised that as soon as he takes charge of Las Rosas, he'll put me back on the ranch with him and—and there'll be no more of this that we're doin' now."

Indian Pete, with a short laugh, turned to say something to Holdbrook and Larry took advantage of the moment to move on toward the cabin. He was within a few steps of the *olla*, hanging on the *ramada* post before the cabin door, when Pete called to him sharply.

"Here, you—stay away from there. You can't go into the house now."

Larry stopped and turning so as to face the Black Canyon boss called back to him: "Sure, 'tis only to get me a drink of water that I'm after, sir. I've no mind to go into the house at all."

With this a woman's scream came from the cabin. "Larry, Larry!" The door flew open, and the Irish boy turned to face his sister.

Speechless, motionless, he stood there as if suddenly confronted by a supernatural being.

A moment she paused in the doorway with her arms outstretched. Then she ran to him. "Oh, Larry, Larry, is it you, my boy—is it my own Larry boy again?"

Beside herself with gladness she embraced him—she shook him as if to convince herself that he was real. She laughed and cried and murmured words of Irish endearment. And Larry laughed and cried with her, drawing her close in his arms and the next instant holding her at arms' length to look at her. Forgetful of their surroundings and unmindful of those who stood watching them the brother and sister gave themselves up to the happiness of the moment.

"Mavourneen, mavourneen, is it you at last or am I dreamin' again?"

"'Tis a long, long way I've come to find you, Larry, dear."

"'Tis a weary, weary time I've been waitin' for you, Nora, darlin'."

She drew back a little, her face radiant with admiration and pride and love. "And would you look at the man you've grown to be! The breadth of your shoulders and the chest of you—and I swear 'tis two inches taller you are at the least."

Larry laughed with delight as he returned: "'Tis to be expected that a man would thicken up a bit, Nora, mavourneen."

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"And you used to be such a skinny little devil," she cried. "I mind well how I would hold you easy with one hand, and you squirming like a basket of eels."

"As for that," he retorted, "you haven't lost any weight yourself—not that any one could notice. You always was an armful of a girl at that, and I'll take my oath you're lookin' ten years younger than when I told you good-bye at the old home gate."

"Have you clean forgot the old home, Larry, dear?"

"Forget the old home, is it? And could any Irishman ever forget Ireland?"

"Not if he was the right kind of an Irishman, he couldn't, and 'tis sure I am that I raised you to be that."

"Ah, Nora, dear, 'tis happy we were in spite of our misery, for 'twas you that could always laugh when any one else would be cryin'."

"And 'twas us that had the right to be happy, Larry, darling, when—" As if her words recalled her thoughts suddenly to their surroundings she paused and the brother, seeing the change in her face, hung his head.

Putting her hand on his arm with a pleading, caressing touch the girl faltered: "But what—what does this mean, Larry boy?"

He looked sidewise at Pete and Holdbrook, stole a quick glance at his sister's face and fixed his gaze again on the ground at his feet. His voice was a half-surly, complaining whine: "What does what mean?"

"You being here in this Black Canyon place with these men."

He stole another quick glance at Indian Pete and made an effort to put some heart into his reply. "Sure, 'tis all right me bein' here, Nora, darlin'."

"But tell me," she persisted unmindful, in her earnestness and in the stress of her emotions, that Pete and Holdbrook heard every word, "tell me 'tis not true that you are one of them, Larry, dear."

He answered helplessly: "'Tis as you see."

Her voice broke in a low cry and covering her face with her hands she moaned: "Mother of God, be kind to me now."

The young man, alarmed at her grief and beside himself with fear, took her in his arms while he attempted to comfort her. "Nora, now mavourneen, 'tis all right me bein' here. There's Mr. Holdbrook, don't you see?"

Dolores started to go to Nora but Indian Pete stepped forward and with a gesture stopped her. Then standing before the sister he demanded harshly: "Who sent you here to-day, heh?"

She looked up at him timidly. "On my soul, sir, nobody sent me. I—I just came for myself."

"Who knows you come?"

"Nobody, sir, except Pablo who showed me the way as I was telling you."

"But you knowed yer brother was here, heh?"

She was silent.

"I could see how you was lyin' when you said you come to visit Dolores," he muttered triumphantly.

It was then that the spirit of the O'Sheas possessed the Irish girl. Throwing aside all pretense she faced

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the Black Canyon chief with the dauntless courage of a wild creature in defense of its young. "And if I lied to you just at first the good Lord will forgive me, for 'twas not for myself but for the boy that's needing me to save him from you and your black-hearted, cattle-thieving, horse-stealing, smuggling, gun-running gang." She whirled on Holdbrook: "'Tis a fine business for a man like you that makes such pretense of being a gentleman, and should be one, to be running with such a gang of murdering devils and a-helping boys like this lad to break the laws of the country and turn his back on friends like Mr. Morgan and the Las Rosas men—the best kind of friends that any lad could ever have. 'Tis not Mr. Morgan's ranch that you'll be getting—'tis the law and the prison that will be getting you and all your Black Canyon company—Jake Zobetser and all—or my name's not O'Shea."

Her brother, terror-stricken, caught her arm. "Nora—Nora, 'tis crazy you are to be sayin' things like this to these gentlemen. Hush girl—be still."

"'Tis you, Larry, that's crazy to think that I'll be keeping still," she retorted. "Unless," she added facing Indian Pete defiantly, "unless my brother goes with me away from this place this minute."

The man replied with grim sarcasm: "Fair enough, I'd say. You ain't wantin' much—only jest to take this here kid an' make him turn state's evidence agin his pardners to save his own sneaking hide. What kind of a fool do you reckon you're talkin' to, anyhow?"

"As for that," she retorted, "I think I'm talking

to one that's not so big a fool that he won't save his own neck when he has the chance."

"You figger that you're givin' me a chance to save my neck?"

"I am that, and you, too, Mr. Jim Holdbrook."

"Jest how do you make it out that way?"

"If you let Larry go with me now, I give you my word we'll leave the country without telling a thing to anybody about what we know of you. Only you, Holdbrook, must give up your hold on Mr. Morgan's ranch so that your father will sell to Mr. Gray."

"And supposin' I don't let you an' Larry go?" demanded Pete.

"Then you'll just have to be taking whatever the law says—for my brother will be telling the truth to the judge just the same when you are arrested."

Indian Pete's vicious eyes narrowed wickedly. "You say no one but Pablo knows you come here?"

"And 'tis the truth," cried the Irish girl boldly. "But if I'm not back at Las Rosas when Mr. Morgan and the boys come home, they'll be looking for me and they'll not be long guessing where to look. 'Tis you that should know what Big Boy Morgan and Long Jo and the others will do if they ever come to Black Canyon for me, now that I've found the truth about my brother."

Pete motioned to Dolores saying in Spanish: "Take this woman into the cabin an' keep watch over her." To the squaw he called in the same tongue: "Go into the cabin an' help Dolores to keep this woman there. She is a prisoner." Then drawing Holdbrook aside he began talking to him in a low tone.

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The Mexican girl put her arm around Nora. "Come with me, Señorita, please."

But the Irish girl was defiant. "Not one step will I stir without Larry."

Dolores whispered to her: "No, no, Señorita, trust to me that love you. Do as Pete say jus' for now. Come with Dolores for a leetle—it ees bes', as I will tell to you—come."

Nora looked at her brother doubtfully.

"I'm thinkin' you should do as they tell you," he muttered weakly.

"And if I go, you'll not be leaving this place without me, Larry, dear?"

It was Dolores who answered: "No, no, Señorita, your brother he will not go away. Come please—it ees best."

When the two girls were in the cabin with the squaw, Dolores whispered: "Queeck, Señorita, you mus' tell to me now everything—how ees it that you know about what these Black Canyon men an' Señor Holdbrook do—everything you mus' tell. Do not be scare of Dolores. Me, I love la Señorita Nora like hell—better than all these Black Canyon that I hate. Tell to me, queeck, while there ees time. The squaw she understan' only her own tongue an' the Spanish—she will not know what it ees you say."

When Nora had told her story the Mexican girl laughed softly. "Ah, that Pablo, he ees the man what a girl like me can love. An' did Pablo send no word for you to speak to me, Señorita?"

"Sure, he did that. 'An' you shall tell my

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Dolores how I wait for her at the old ruin where we make our love,' he said in just those words."

"*Bueno, bueno, gracias*, Señorita Nora," whispered the Mexican girl, her soft eyes glowing with delight. "That ees good. It ees as you teach me all the time—love it ees the only thing. With a man like my Pablo—me, I theenk Las Rosas, it ees nothing."

"And will Indian Pete be letting Larry go away with me, do you think?" asked Nora anxiously.

Dolores' face was grave. "That Indian Pete and Holdbrook they are make the talk now about what they will do. When they have finish, pretty queeck now Holdbrook he will come to you—if I make the guess right—you will see. Injun Pete, he ees scare like hell of Señor Morgan an' the Las Rosas cowboys. That I know. Me, I theenk—but wait—Holdbrook, he ees come now. Have the care, Señorita, that you let him say all he have to tell. Then will we know what ees the bes'."

Jim Holdbrook entered the cabin with the air of one who knows himself to be master of the situation. But with all his confident bearing there was a touch of regret—of almost sadness—in the man's face. It was as though while he knew his power and would use it, he was for some reason reluctant to do so, hoping rather to accomplish his end by some gentler means.

"Pete wants you, Dolores," he said. "You are to take the squaw with you."

Dolores spoke to the Indian woman, and they left the cabin.

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Holdbrook closed the door and without a word to the girl went slowly across the room to the window where he stood looking out as if absorbed in thought. Nora silently watching, waiting for him to speak—wondering what he would say—with a prayer in her heart for wisdom and strength.

At last he turned from the window. "Miss O'Shea, I am sorry. It is very unfortunate that you should have come here to-day. That fellow, Pablo, made a terrible mistake when he told you about your brother—just at this time."

The man had spoken with evident sincerity.

Nora answered calmly: "'Twas the truth Pablo told me and 'twas not to be expected that I would wait any longer for Larry to come to me."

"I understand," he returned kindly. "But if only you could have waited two or three days longer—or, rather, if only Pablo had not told you—everything would have been all right. Now—" he finished the sentence with a shrug of his shoulders and a doubtful shake of his head. "You see," he continued, "it was already arranged that as soon as I took over Las Rosas, Larry was to go back to the ranch with me, and this miserable Black Canyon business was to be forgotten. Zobetser and I talked it all over last night in Tucson. He agreed with me that there should be no more of this sort of thing in the future. If that Mexican had not interfered, you would never have known but what Larry was returning from that trip which you were led to believe he had taken for Morgan."

"What a pity," said the girl. "And will you tell

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me, sir, is it true that you and my brother were such good friends before he left Las Rosas?"

The man hesitated. "Yes, that is true."

"Then, sir, 'tis to be supposed that I have to thank you for my brother being led into this Black Canyon business, as you call it?"

"The boy wanted money to send to you and your mother, and I helped him to get it."

"God in heaven!—and me all the time thinking it was Mr. Morgan, like the boy told me in his letters."

"Morgan never did anything for Larry," said Holdbrook shortly.

"And are you expecting me to be grateful to you for what you did for the boy?" she retorted quickly.

"Miss O'Shea, I am sorry for my connection with this matter, won't you believe me?"

"'Tis good reason you have to be sorry, sir," she returned coldly.

"Do you think it impossible for a man to change his ways of thinking and living? I mean to—well—to reform?"

"I'm thinking that depends on the man."

"Ever since I can remember, Miss O'Shea, I have been taught that the main thing in life was to get what you wanted—no matter how you got it. My father's business code barred nothing that could be done legally. My mother, if she had any different ideas, was much too busy getting what she wanted to give much attention to me. When father got the control of Las Rosas and sent me out here with the promise that if I went straight for a year

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he would give it to me, I had no thought of settling down. I left Philadelphia because it was best for me to go away for a while, but I never meant to stay in Arizona longer than was necessary to get the ranch from father. I heard about Zobetser and how he had always wanted Las Rosas, and so I made his acquaintance with the idea of selling to him as soon as father turned it over to me. You understand that owning the controlling interest is just the same as owning the whole thing if it is handled right, so Zobetser was willing to pay a good price the moment I was in a position to deliver the goods. Well, Zobetser and I got better acquainted and he finally interested me in his Black Canyon operations. As for this sort of thing being wrong—I don't see yet how it's any worse than a lot of things that are done every day in business. Why, the way my father took the control of Jack Morgan's ranch away from him is ten times worse than anything Jake Zobetser and I are doing. We're only beating the government out of a few dollars. Aren't thousands of people doing the same thing every day—in other ways, of course? It's only a question of how you look at it. It's all just a matter of business, you know—getting the biggest returns for your investment no matter how you get it. Well, then you came and as I told you, you have made me see things in a different way. I don't mean this Black Canyon business—I mean that I am not going to sell out Las Rosas to Zobetser, now. I am going to develop the ranch myself along the lines planned by Jack Morgan's father. Morgan will be down

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and out in a year and will be glad to let his remaining interest go. I can put over a deal with Zobetser and unite the two places which will make an empire. There is no limit to what a man can do with such backing. And Miss O'Shea—Nora—I want you to share it all with me. This is the first time in my life that I have ever wanted to do anything really worth doing—won't you help me?"

The Irish girl started to speak, but he checked her. "Wait, please hear me out. I have tried to tell you how sorry I am for the past. I promise you that there will be no more of this Black Canyon business. From now on everything I do will be as legal as any deal that father himself would make. No man could love you more sincerely than I love you. I can give you everything in life that a woman desires. Your brother Larry shall have every opportunity. Think what it will mean to you, to Larry, and to me, Nora. Won't you say 'yes'? Won't you be my wife?"

"And is this the same that you promised Dolores?"

"You know Dolores cares nothing for me."

"And are you thinking of what your taking Las Rosas means to Mr. Morgan, while you're telling me that you have no real right to the ranch his father left to him and that he loves better than his life?"

"As for that," he answered strongly, "business is business. You can't blame a man for taking advantage of you if you give him the opportunity. Jack Morgan went into the deal with my father, and he must take the consequences. If he wasn't strong

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enough to keep his inheritance, that's not my look out. He made his bed—he must lie in it."

"Oh, I see. Well, I'm thinking that if every man had to sleep in the bed he makes, there'd be little rest for any of us."

"You are not answering my question," he insisted gently. "Don't you know that I love you?"

"'Tis you, sir, that should know the answer to your question without me troubling to say 'no,'" she returned. "So if you please we'll just keep the matter as you present it. Business is business, you say. Well, with all that you're offering for me 'tis not enough by a hundred times, considering the encumbrance on the property."

The man's face flushed. "You are refusing? All that I am offering you?"

"I am refusing to change the name of O'Shea for anything that is as black with dishonor, dishonesty, and plain indecency as the name of Holdbrook."

The man rose slowly to his feet. He had been sincere. He did love this Irish girl with a love that was different from any he had ever known. Under the spell of that love he had seen a vision. He wanted this woman who had brought into his life this thing. He could not contemplate his vision apart from her. But the mental habits, the spiritual conceptions of his years—the viewpoint from which he had always seen life, the creed under which from his earliest childhood he had matured, these were not too easily changed.

Nora O'Shea, watching, saw the look of a desperate animal come into his eyes. "All right, have

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it your own way," he said harshly. "You understand that you are prisoner here, don't you?"

The Irish girl bowed her head.

"Well, to-morrow night we have some stuff going across the line. Indian Pete proposes to send you along. Do you know what that means? It means that you will be taken so far into Mexico that you will never be heard of again. It means that you will be alone in a country where you can't even speak a word of the language and that you will be made to earn money for those who will take charge of you and earn it in a way that will be a lot harder than being my wife. You needn't count on any help from Larry. If you make that trip, you'll never even hear of him again. And don't count on your Las Rosas friends. I am going to the ranch now, and I will explain to them that I told you your brother was working on the Black Canyon ranch and that you have joined him and are spending the night here with Dolores, so they will not be uneasy about you. Pablo won't tell how you came because it will look all right to him, and he will be afraid to let Morgán and the boys know what he did. You are caught, my lady, and you will say 'yes' to me, or I will let Indian Pete go on with his little plan. That's all until I see you to-morrow."

Giving her no opportunity to reply he went quickly to the door and throwing it open called Dolores. When the Mexican girl and the squaw reëntered the cabin he went out without even a glance toward Nora O'Shea.

CHAPTER XVIII

AT THE OLD ADOBE RUIN

WHEN Big Boy Morgan, Charlie Gray, and the Las Rosas cowboys returned from the east mesa late that afternoon they were not long in hearing from Wing Foo of Nora's absence.

Pablo, when questioned by Morgan, told how he had saddled Sarco for the girl and how she had ridden with him as far as the gate on the west side of the valley pasture. There the Mexican had left her and had gone on about the work to which Morgan had assigned him in the south pasture. The last he had seen of the girl, he said, she was riding leisurely along the hillside toward Arivaca—a ride she had taken often with Gray.

The men were about to saddle fresh horses to go in search of the Irish girl when Holdbrook rode into the corral.

Morgan, at once, asked him if he had seen Nora, and Holdbrook answered easily: "Certainly, I have seen her—I have been with her all day."

"Where is she now?"

"At Black Canyon with her brother and Dolores."

There was an angry movement among the cowboys—with low-muttered exclamations and growling comments they drew closer together. Pablo, unob-

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served, moved toward the corral gate. Morgan's voice was cool but charged with something which caused a hush to fall upon the little company. "I think, Holdbrook, you had better explain."

"Explain what?"

"How did Miss O'Shea learn that her brother was at Black Canyon?"

"I told her."

Morgan, with a gesture, checked the riders who started forward with angry murmurs. The interest of the little group of men was centered so intently upon Holdbrook that they did not notice Pablo, whose face at that moment would certainly have betrayed him.

Holdbrook assumed an air of righteous indignation. "I can't see what there is for you fellows to get so worked up over. Miss O'Shea had a perfect right to know that her brother had quit this outfit for a job with better pay on the Black Canyon ranch. Larry wasn't your slave, Morgan, that you should consider him a criminal for leaving your employ. Neither is his sister such an idiot that she needs the peculiar protection you fellows have assumed to give her." He paused and looked at Pablo, who had come nearer.

"Go on," said Morgan grimly.

"But I can't see that there's anything to go on about," returned Holdbrook with a laugh. "That's all there is to it. I told Miss O'Shea that her brother, for reasons of his own, had left you and was working with the Black Canyon outfit. She went to see him. Dolores invited her to stay the

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night. She accepted. She is coming back to-morrow. Day after to-morrow Larry comes back to work for me here at Las Rosas—if that's of any interest to you. As for what Nora thinks of your high-handed interference between herself and her brother, you will hear that from the girl herself."

"When did you tell her?"

"This morning. I had returned from Tucson to Arivaca and was riding home when I met her over on the other side of the valley. She was lonesome and homesick, wanted to see Larry, so I told her where the boy was. She would have known all about it from Larry himself day after to-morrow anyway. She was anxious to see the boy, naturally, and so I went with her to the canyon. She has been with her brother all day. And, as I told you, will spend the night with Dolores. I am going back to the canyon to-morrow and will bring her home with me."

There was a note of triumph in Holdbrook's voice with a suggestion of excited happiness in his manner which led the Las Rosas men to supplement his explanation with reasons and conjectures of their own. In short, the cowboys were convinced that Holdbrook, in spite of the little scene they had witnessed, had won the Irish girl and that her future, over which they had been so concerned, was thus provided for—which was exactly the impression Holdbrook meant to convey.

It was a gloomy company that sat under the umbrella tree after supper that evening. Holdbrook had ridden away to Arivaca. Morgan was standing alone at the big gate, apparently watching

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the sunset—at least the young ranchman was looking with fixed attention toward the west.

Presently Charlie Gray joined his friend. “Jack, may I borrow your roadster this evening?”

Big Boy transferred his attention from the sunset to Gray with a show of interest in the student’s unusual request. “Of course, Charlie.”

“I want to run into town,” Gray explained. “Holdbrook didn’t bring the mail, and we haven’t had any for several days.”

Morgan looked again toward the west as if dismissing a matter of such trivial importance from his mind. But as Gray was turning away, Big Boy said suddenly: “I believe I’ll go with you, Charlie.”

At this the student faced him again but for a moment seemed reluctant to speak. Then he said slowly: “I don’t believe I would if I were you, Jack.”

“Why not?”

Gray hesitated: “I don’t know that there is any reason—but—well, I can’t help feeling that you should stay here at the ranch.”

With characteristic frankness, Big Boy went straight to the point: “You don’t take much stock in Holdbrook’s yarn, do you, Charlie?”

“Do you?”

“No, I don’t—I had just about decided to saddle a horse and ride over to Pete’s place to satisfy myself.”

“Don’t do it, Jack,” returned Gray quickly. “I’m sure that Nora is there with Larry and Dolores all right, and I don’t see what harm can come to her

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to-night, but I don't even begin to believe all that Holdbrook was so anxious for us to think."

"Neither do I," returned Morgan emphatically. "But just the same I want to know the whole thing from Nora herself."

"Not to-night, Jack. If you go to Black Canyon with your usual bull-in-the-China-shop methods, you may upset everything that Nora is trying to do."

Big Boy stared at his friend in amazement. "What is it that Nora is trying to do?"

"Don't you know—haven't you even guessed?"

"I suppose she is trying to see her brother."

"Oh, good Lord, Jack, wake up! The girl wants her brother, of course, but there is more than that in it. Ever since she learned about the fix you are in, she hasn't thought of anything but how to save Las Rosas for you."

Big Boy Morgan caught his friend's arm in a grip which made Gray wince. "And is that the explanation of her friendship with Jim Holdbrook?"

"Let go my arm. Yes, that explains everything—*everything*—do you understand? You big moose!"

"Well, I'm damned," murmured Big Boy.

"You certainly will be," agreed the student heartily, "if you don't listen to some one who has a little sense."

Morgan smiled happily. "Meaning yourself?"

"Meaning myself—in this particular case," retorted Gray. "Seriously, Jack, if you are wise you will stick right here on the ranch until Nora returns. Attend strictly to your own affairs; stay

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away from Holdbrook, and be quietly ready for what ever may turn up."

"And what are you going to do?"

"I ought to go to town for the mail, but if you don't give me your word that you will do as I say, I can't do anything."

"All right—I promise—I won't leave the place. Sure you wouldn't like to blindfold me and tie my hands or chloroform me or something, so you could feel perfectly safe?"

But Charlie Gray was already on his way to the automobile.

Morgan opened the gate for his friend, and long after the machine had disappeared the young ranchman stood there with his face turned again toward the sunset sky. Black Canyon was just over there beyond those hills.

Big Boy Morgan had no fear for Nora's safety because he was not aware that she knew the real nature of the Black Canyon outfit, and because Holdbrook's return to Las Rosas and his manner had convinced the young ranchman that the Irish girl was safe. He saw in Gray's admonition to be ready for anything that might turn up nothing more than an expression of the student's reaction to Holdbrook's story that Nora had joined her brother. His friend's wish to go for the mail, he thought, was born of Gray's state of mind and his nervous desire to be doing something. The one thing that had so disturbed Big Boy was the impression Holdbrook had managed to convey of his relation to Nora—and on that question Charlie Gray had put the

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ranchman's mind at ease. For Big Boy Morgan, that evening, nothing else mattered.

The flaming red and gleaming gold of the sunset softened into the more quiet tints of the afterglow. The shadows of the twilight deepened into the dusk of evening. The last faint touch of color in the western sky back of Yellow Jacket Peak vanished. The night was fully come, and with the night the moon. Under the umbrella tree by the ranch house, under the cottonwoods and willows in the valley pastures, under the mesquite trees in the washes, and beneath the oaks on the mountain sides—ink black shadows. On the crests of the billowy hills, on open flat and mesa, on the rippling seas of grama grass, in the big yard between the ranch house and the barn—a flood of mellow light. The cowboys, lounging on the bunk house porch, were talking in low tones. Big Boy Morgan sat alone on the veranda overlooking the rose garden.

At the old adobe ruin a quarter of a mile below the barn and corrals, a great horned owl perched on a corner of the crumbling walls. From somewhere in the hills a cow bawled mournfully. A coyote, scouting for his evening meal on the farther side of the valley, yapped his weird chorus. A fox barked from the thicket of cat claw beyond the ruin. The owl spread its great wings and silent as a shadow drifted away into the night. A man appeared suddenly in the patch of moonlight in front of the ruin and as quickly vanished in the black shadows of the ancient walls.

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An hour passed. There was no movement within the old ruin but the owl did not return to his place on the corner of the wall. The fox crept as close as the far edge of the patch of moonlight but swerved aside and passed the place with a quick burst of speed. Then in the stillness came the sharp sound of a horse's iron shoes striking against a rock and in the black shadow of the ruin there was a sudden movement. A moment later a horse and rider approached—coming along the ridge across the sea of grama grass through the bright moonlight and the black shadows. When quite close to the ancient walls the horse stopped and a low, musical voice called in Spanish: "Pablo, are you there?"

The *vaquero* came out from the black shadows of the walls, and Dolores slipped from the saddle into his arms.

But it was not long until the happy pair were interrupted by a sound which came from the farther end of the ruin.

Pablo, with a quick movement, swung the girl behind him and in the same fraction of a second a gun was in his free hand.

"Who ees there?" he called sharply and repeated the challenge in Spanish.

A familiar voice answered from behind the corner of the wall. "Don't shoot, Pablo, it is all right."

"Mother of God, Señor Gray! What ees it that you do? Pretty near one little minute more you get yourself killed for sure."

As Charlie Gray stepped out into the moonlight

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and came toward them, the *vaquero* returned his gun to its holster and put his arm around Dolores.

The student removed his hat. "Congratulations, Pablo. Miss Dolores, I am very happy for you. Will you both forgive me for intruding at such a moment?"

"*Gracias, Señor,*" returned the Mexican girl quietly, "It ees ver' sure that my Pablo and me know how you are all the time one good frien'. It ees because of la Señorita Nora that you come, I theenk, yes?"

"Yes, it is for Nora. You see, Pablo, I couldn't quite believe all that Holdbrook told us about meeting the girl and going with her to Black Canyon, and I noticed that you seemed puzzled over it, too. So I managed to have a little talk with Wing Foo. Wing told me that he saw you and Nora riding over the hill on the other side of the valley, and by that I knew you had not left her at the pasture gate as you said. When I considered your love for Dolores I could see a reason for your telling Nora about her brother and helping her to go to the canyon; while Holdbrook had every reason for not telling her. I knew how much Dolores loved Nora, and I believed that if Nora was in any danger Dolores would try to save her. Of course, I reasoned, too, that you would surely send word by Nora to Dolores that you would wait for her here."

Pablo smiled happily. "Me, I think you one damn smart man, Señor Gray."

And Dolores added: "*Si*, and me, I theenk it ees

that Señor Gray ees one good frien' to La Señorita Nora."

"We are all Nora's friends, Dolores," returned Gray quietly.

"An' ees it that Señor Morgan an' the others know how you think?" asked Pablo with a shade of anxiety.

"Not a soul knows anything about my coming here, Pablo." Then Gray explained how he had borrowed Morgan's car on the plea of going to Tucson and when out of sight from the ranch buildings had driven it into the brush and left it. "You see, Pablo, I could not be sure that there was anything wrong and didn't like to take a chance by starting something before I knew whether I was right or not. Tell me, Dolores, is Miss Nora safe? Is it all right for her to be at the canyon with her brother?"

"No, no, no, Señor Gray, it ees all wrong. Me, I love la Señorita Nora who talk to me the mother talk, and who save me from make the big meestake with that Jim Holdbrook when all the time it ees my man, Pablo, that I love. And so, Señor, I will tell you all—everything that Injun Pete will do. Pablo and me, we are to go to the priest now, and Pablo ees the man that can take care of his Dolores that he love, and so to save la Señorita Nora, me, I will tell about that Black Canyon that I hate."

The Mexican girl gave to Gray in detail all the facts about the operations of Zobetser and his Black Canyon outfit—told him of the shipment that had been brought to the canyon by automobiles the night before—how the arms and ammunition were at

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that moment stored at Pete's place and would be forwarded to-morrow night, and explained how Nora's visit to the canyon, at this particular time, together with her arraignment of the Black Canyon outfit and her threats of arrest had placed her in grave danger.

"And then thees man, Jim Holdbrook, he ees try to make la Señorita Nora say she will be his wife and tell to her how it ees she will be send away into Mexico with the smugglers if she do not say the 'yes' to heem. But Señorita Nora, she will not say to him the 'yes'—she say 'no' because of her love for Señor Morgan—but that, la Señorita did not say to me—then Holdbrook and Injun Pete they make again the talk what they will do. Pete, he ees say sure how he will send la Señorita away. Holdbrook, he ees say 'no,' he will make with her the marriage and she shall not be send away because when she ees marry with heem then will she not tell about the Black Canyon what they do. You mus' believe, Señor Gray, how it ees thees Holdbrook man that love la Señorita Nora for sure as hell. Me, I know—ees it not so, my Pablo?"

"*Si*, it ees so, Holdbrook, he love her all right."

Dolores continued: "*Si*, and so because of his love which is sure, thees Holdbrook, he will not let Injun Pete send la Señorita Nora away into Mexico if she will make with heem the marriage. Holdbrook, he ees tell to la Señorita that she will be send away if she do not say 'yes' to heem and that ees for scare her to make her say the 'yes.' It ees because of his love that the man he scare her, and it

ees because of his love that he say to Pete 'no, you mus' not hurt la Señorita Nora—not one leetle bit—if she will marry with me.' But if she will not with heem make the marriage, then because of that same love he will send her away where one such as la Señorita can do nothing but die.

"Then Holdbrook, he go to Las Rosas and Injun Pete, he do not know what ees bes'. He scare of what la Señorita know and say she will do. He want for her to be send away because then he theenk if it ees not for la Señorita Nora, then it ees with me that Holdbrook will make the marriage and so we will have Las Rosas. He scare to send la Señorita Nora away when Holdbrook say 'no' because if he do then it ees Holdbrook that will make for heem the trouble. And so Injun Pete, he ees send the, what you call, messenger, to Zobetser thees night to ask of heem what ees bes' thing he shall do. Me, I come away by the back of the house so as no one shall know and ride queeck to my Pablo to help for so sure as hell, Señor Gray, if Zobetser say the word to send la Señorita Nora away, she will never come back to Las Rosas again. If Zobetser say the word 'kill,' she ees already the same as dead. It ees so. Me, I would like to try and bring la Señorita Nora away with me, too, but I theenk she would not come if her brother he not come too, and that would make one big fight which for Larry ees impossible. La Señorita's brother ees not like her—he ees in a fight no good. Not like my Pablo would be, Señor Gray, if it was his Dolores that Pete try to send away."

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"Did Nora know you were coming for help?"

"No, Injun Pete he ees not let me speak with la Señorita Nora after he make the talk with Holdbrook what they shall do. La Señorita, she ees shut in the cabin with only Pete's squaw."

"What time did Pete's messenger start?"

"The messenger, he ees start from the canyon when it ees first dark. But he will not ride all the way to Tucson, Señor Gray. He will ride only to a place on the Nogales road. From there will a man go queeck in an automobile. Zobetser and Pete, they all time make the messengers that way."

"Do you know this man's name—the one who goes in the automobile?"

"Si, Señor, me, I have myself gone with heem to Tucson in his automobile. His name it ees Whitson."

"What sort of a car has he?"

"Ees it the automobile that you ask?"

"Yes."

"It ees what you call Ford—an old thing with a, what you call, box like a wagon, and the top it ees every where all holes."

"How long will it take the man to ride from the canyon to the Nogales road, Pablo?"

"If the man he start at dark, he should be there one hour from now."

"Dolores, will the man who rides from the canyon wait for the man with the automobile to come back with the answer from Zobetser?"

"No, no, that man who ride, he will come queeck back to Black Canyon to tell Pete if it ees all right."

Zobetser, he will send some one with the answer from Tucson. I no can tell—maybe the answer he will not come by the Nogales road—maybe he will come by other way—by the Altar Valley—we no can tell.”

“Good!” cried Gray. “Now listen, Dolores, you must go back to the canyon.”

“*Si*, Señor, that ees what I theenk to do for la Señorita Nora.”

“Right, and don’t let them think that you have started anything—you can do that?”

“*Si*, Señor, that ees easy to do, what you say.”

“And, Pablo, don’t you let a soul know what we know, *sabe?*”

“*Si*, Señor. But ees it not best that we tell Señor Morgan an’ the boys so that we can go to Black Canyon quick an’ bring la Señorita Nora an’ her brother away from that place?”

“No, Pablo, that would not do. There is a better way—a way that will save Nora and save Las Rosas for Mr. Morgan, too.”

“Me, I know,” cried Dolores, “it ees if Holdbrook ees, what you call, arrest before to-morrow that ees July first—then will he not get Las Rosas from his father. Ees it not so?”

“Exactly,” said Gray. “So do as I tell you, Pablo. I am off now, for Tucson. Don’t keep Dolores. *Adios.*”

As he disappeared Pablo said to Dolores in Spanish: “An’ that ees the man everybody think ees sick. Me, I think la Señorita Nora she ees good medicine. Come, you an’ me, we mus’ do what Señor Gray say.”

CHAPTER XIX

ZOBETSER'S MESSENGER

WHEN, in the Black Canyon cabin, Jim Holdbrook's attitude toward Nora changed so abruptly with her refusal to accept his love, the Irish girl, for the first time, realized fully the danger into which she had come. She could not, now, underestimate the disastrous effect of her rash arraignment of the Black Canyon outfit and her bold threats of arrest which had revealed to Indian Pete and Holdbrook her knowledge of their lawless operations. She was far too intelligent not to see how her past intimacy with Holdbrook would make it easy for him to convince the Las Rosas men that she was in Black Canyon as a result of that friendship and that having joined her brother she was staying at the canyon of her own free will. She was clever enough, too, to guess the impression Holdbrook would give of his relationship with her. All of which meant that she need hope for no relief from Morgan and his riders.

Nora had barely time to tell Dolores what Holdbrook had said when the Mexican girl was called from the cabin by Indian Pete and forbidden to go near the prisoner again. Larry was not permitted even to approach the cabin where his sister was

confined. In the late afternoon the Black Canyon riders came in—six of them—hard-faced Americans and Mexicans—worthy followers of Indian Pete. The Irish girl heard the sounds of their arrival and listened to the murmur of their voices but did not see them. She knew nothing of the dispute between Holdbrook and Indian Pete as to her future. She did not know of the messenger being sent to Zobetser. She was not aware that Dolores had gone to Pablo. The squaw was always on guard and that night slept in the room with her. With every long, dreadful hour of her imprisonment the Irish girl became more hopeless. From the little window she watched the slow coming of the morning and wondered dully what the day would bring.

During the forenoon Holdbrook returned from Las Rosas and, after a short conference with Indian Pete, went to the girl in the cabin. As on the occasion of his previous interview the man was, at first, not unkind, and Nora was sure that she could see in his face and eyes the look of one under a terrific mental or spiritual strain. She received him in silence.

For an hour the man plead with her—assuring her of his deep regret for the past, holding out to her his promises of a future with every material good that wealth could give—not only for herself but for her brother. He told her of the situation at Las Rosas and how on the following day when he assumed control Morgan and Gray, at least, would be leaving the ranch. He again set before her the horror of the fate that was in store for her if she was

sent away that coming night with the smugglers as Indian Pete had planned, and showed the hopelessness of her position if she refused to accept him and all that he offered. And with it all he assured her again and again of the genuineness and the depth of his love. He even advanced the subtle argument that it was her duty to save her brother from the fate that awaited him, and played upon her love for the boy to whom her life was devoted.

"Why don't you answer—why don't you say something?" he cried at last with desperate earnestness. "Don't you believe in my love for you?"

The Irish girl spoke slowly: "And how could you be expecting me to believe in your love when you're showing so plain that you don't even know what love is?"

In a voice which shook with emotion he said: "You refuse even to believe that I love you?"

"Sure, sir, and I could as easily believe that night is day, or black is white."

At her words, the man's face was filled with amazement, doubt and pain. His love for her was so real—he was so conscious that it was the one big, vital thing that he had ever experienced—it had never occurred to him that she could question its existence. He knew how pitiful his life was, compared to her life. He could understand why she would refuse to accept the love he offered. But that she should find it impossible to accept even the *fact* of his love, was maddening.

As many a soul has been trapped, Jim Holdbrook was caught between the warring forces of all that he

had been and all that he now aspired to be. On the one hand—his parents with their shoddy, superficial lives, his home with its sham and insincerities, his education with its false ideals, his business and social environments with their lack of moral standards. On the other hand—the appeal of all that this Irish girl had revealed to him through her character which was formed of sacrifice and poverty and work and sorrow and devotion and love and idealism. On the one side there was that lust which was the inevitable result of his years of wanton yielding to every base passion to which he was heir with no count of the cost to those whom he forced or tricked or persuaded to minister to his desire. Opposed to this, there was a love which to him was as new and strange as it was real and appealing. When there was left for him only husks of wretched discontent, unhappiness, and cynical self-loathing, this woman had set before him the good grain of life, and his soul hungered. But the man knew no way to possess the worthy thing he craved save by the ruthless ways of the swine with whom he had for so long been associated.

“How can you help knowing that I love you?” he cried desperately. “Don’t you understand that it is because of my love that I will let them take you away? Without you there is nothing left for me—no happiness, no decent living, no honorable place in the world, no home, no future. If you make life hell for me, why should I care what becomes of you? If I can’t have you, rather than see you the wife of some other man, I will let them make of you a thing

which no man would have. If I am to lose you, I will not add to that the torture of seeing you give to another all that you are denying me."

The Irish girl shook her head sadly. "God pity you, sir. And you so blind because of what you are that you can't see what it is that you would do. If I were to be selling myself to you on your terms, do you think you would be having my love? 'Tis the truth that there's nothing they can be doing to me that would be so bad as living with you under such conditions. As for me saving my brother—make no mistake, sir, it can't be done that way. My Larry would rather be dead than to have me, his sister, pay such a price for his life. And even if it were possible that the boy would permit such disgrace to the name of O'Shea then 'tis me that would rather dig his grave with my own two hands than be looking him in the face day by day, knowing that he was the kind of a man that would consent to live under such a shame."

Baffled, defeated, yet refusing to acknowledge his defeat, Holdbrook, without attempting to reply, went to the window and stood gazing moodily down the canyon. Suddenly he uttered a startled exclamation and rushed from the cabin with headlong haste.

The girl sprang to the window. She was just in time to glimpse an approaching automobile as it passed from her sight where the road up the canyon drew closer to the foot of the bench on which the house stood. Then presently she heard the motor stop at the corrals below. What did it mean? Breathless with anxiety and hope and fear, she lis-

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tened to the voices of the men in front of the house. She put her ear to the door but could distinguish no word. The squaw motioned angrily for her to go to the far corner of the room.

The man, who alighted from the automobile under the eyes of Indian Pete, Holdbrook, and the Black Canyon riders, climbed the path up to the house level and approached the group of men with the air of one who comes on no uncertain mission. He was of medium height, dressed in ordinary business clothes, and by the gray in his beard and hair would have been judged as a little past middle age. He wore tinted glasses and his skin, without the deep tan usual to men of Arizona, was dark, which gave to his face a somewhat foreign look. Pausing a moment at the head of the path, he coolly looked over the men of the Black Canyon outfit, then with perfect assurance addressed Indian Pete.

"You are in charge here, I believe?" His voice and his manner of speech strengthened the impression that the man was not a native-born American.

Indian Pete grunted a surly reply.

The stranger looked the squaw man up and down with slow appraising gaze, then he said sharply: "I am not mistaken, I think—this is Mr. Jake Zobetser's ranch, is it not? You are Zobetser's foreman?"

A hint of respect came into Pete's manner and tone. "That's right, sir. What can we do for you?"

"I was sure I had not missed the road," returned the stranger with just a suggestion of relief in his voice. "They told me at the little town back there

that I could not go wrong. I am come from Mr. Zobetser in answer to the message you sent last night."

Pete's close-set eyes gleamed warily through his narrowed lids. "Oh, you have, have you?"

The stranger again looked Zobetser's man over with his cool, deliberately appraising air, and when he finally spoke there was an edge to his voice that caused the squaw man to shift his gaze. "Send these men about their business. I prefer to talk with you alone."

Pete motioned to the others and they withdrew down the path to the corral. But Holdbrook held his place.

The stranger said with a shade more courtesy: "You are Mr. Holdbrook, I presume?"

Holdbrook bowed.

"It's all right," growled Pete, "you can say what you have to say before him."

Again the man's air was that of a superior who is not wholly pleased with the attitude of an inferior. "I am well aware of the fact that I can say what I have to say to Mr. Holdbrook." His words were accompanied by a slight bow to Holdbrook. "Mr. Zobetser has told me about your connection with him and of your plans when you have come into the control of the Morgan ranch. I should explain that I am Mr. Zobetser's Chicago partner. It is I who attend to the eastern end of these shipments which, through Zobetser and his organization, go to our customers in Mexico. I am in Tucson for a conference with my partner, Mr. Zobetser, and the

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people to whom we have been sending arms and ammunition. I have several times before come to Tucson but always for a few hours only. This time I am making a somewhat longer stay. The meeting with the gentlemen from below the line is not until to-morrow night. I was with Mr. Zobetser last night when the messenger, Whitson, came. As this matter is of unusual importance and Mr. Zobetser feels compelled to be in Tucson to-day to meet personally the gentlemen from Mexico when they arrive, he asked me to come here in his stead. It would be well, I think, if you men would tell me in detail about this Irish girl coming to you and how much she knows. Is she aware that you have a shipment here on the place now which is to be forwarded across the line to-night?"

Indian Pete appeared reluctant to talk, and in as much as the man had been addressing himself mainly to Holdbrook, that gentleman answered.

When Zobetser's partner was satisfied as to the details of the situation, he said: "Mr. Zobetser thinks—and I agree with him—that it would be a disastrous mistake to send this young woman away."

"It would, heh?" growled Pete. "Well what is Jake wantin' us to do with her?"

"She must be returned to Las Rosas."

"What!"

"Exactly. Listen—Mr. Holdbrook has made her presence here, for one night, appear reasonable to her friends at this other ranch—but don't overlook the fact that they know she is here. If she disap-

pears, there are sure to be inquiries which would be very dangerous for us. This man, Morgan, I understand, would not be easily sidetracked. If she returns to her friends to-day, everything will appear perfectly natural and the fact that she has been here to visit her brother and has returned will help to allay any suspicion that may already have arisen. Do you not see?"

"I see what she'll do to us if she ever gets back to Las Rosas," said Pete.

"She will do nothing," returned Zobetser's partner, "because of her own brother who would suffer if she talked."

"She's already figgerin' on the kid turnin' state's evidence," said Pete.

The man in authority turned again to Holdbrook: "This is what Mr. Zobetser says you must do: 'Tell this young woman that her brother shall leave Black Canyon to-morrow and join her at your ranch, and that he, Zobetser, will be personally responsible for the safety of her brother as long as she keeps what she has learned to herself, but that if she makes trouble, Larry O'Shea will not live to give any evidence against his companions.'"

"Them's Jake's orders, be they?" asked Pete.

"Exactly, sir," came the crisp reply.

Holdbrook hesitated. He was not wholly pleased at this turn of affairs, but he did not see how he was to better the situation. While he was thinking it over, Pete called to Dolores in Spanish, and the Mexican girl ran to the cabin. A moment later she reappeared with Nora.

Big Boy Morgan's happiness in what Charlie Gray told him of Nora's friendship with Holdbrook had, for that evening, banished everything else from his thoughts. But when the morning came and Gray did not return, the ranchman was possessed by a vague feeling of uneasiness. What had Gray meant by saying that Nora was trying to save Las Rosas? What plans could he, Morgan, upset by going to Black Canyon after the girl? Why had Gray insisted so strongly that he stay at the ranch and be ready for whatever might turn up? What did Gray think might turn up? The more Big Boy considered the situation, the more he was convinced that it was not for the mail alone that Charlie Gray had gone to Tucson. When he called the riders together and told them briefly what Gray had said, he found that they shared his uneasiness.

"'Tain't no way natural for a girl like Nora to be a tyin' up permanent with a hombre like that there Holdbrook," said Curly.

And Stub added: "It's jest as unnatural fer her as it is natural for him to try to make us believe that he's already got her."

"You bet yer life," agreed Bill.

"What do you think, Jo?" asked Morgan.

"I don't know," returned the foreman, "but what's the matter with us a-ridin' over to Pete's place and findin' out what's what."

A chorus of approval followed Long Jo's characteristic suggestion. But Pablo, who was an anxious listener to the discussion, ventured a word: "Excuse, Señor Morgan, ees it not that you say how Señor

Gray tell for us jus' to stay at Las Rosas an' be ready? Me, I think Señor Gray ees no fool. All the time he ees think, think. All the time he ees know what ees bes' to do. If he go to Tucson, it ees that he know for why he go. Señor Gray, he ees not say for us to stay an' be ready jus' to make the talk. No, by damn, it ees for the best that we do it?"

"You're right, Pablo," said Morgan heartily. "Gray had some reason for saying what he did or he wouldn't have said it. It's up to us to back his play, boys—at least until he returns and shows us his cards."

With their horses saddled and ready, the Las Rosas men waited. And every long hour—when Charlie Gray did not return—increased their anxiety. What had happened? What had Gray feared might happen? Would Holdbrook bring Nora back to Las Rosas as he had said he would? They were all under the umbrella tree talking in low tones—listening for the sound of the expected automobile bringing Gray,—when Nora and Holdbrook rode over the hills from the direction of Black Canyon.

"Look!" said Pablo, "it ees la Señorita Nora—she has come back safe." Under his breath, he added: "By damn, it ees Holdbrook that ees safe, too. Now what you think, heh?"

In a dead silence the Las Rosas men watched the approaching couple. The Irish girl, as they rode up to the gate in front of the house, kept her face turned away and her eyes fixed on the ground. Paying no attention to the silent group under the

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umbrella tree, Holdbrook helped her from her horse and escorted her to the house.

It was Stub who broke the silence. "And that settles it, I reckon."

"It's hard to believe, just the same," said Curly mournfully.

"You bet yer life," groaned Bill.

Long Jo spoke: "As I understand it, sir, this Holdbrook person takes charge of the outfit to-morrow morning? Is that right, sir?"

Big Boy answered calmly: "Yes, Jo, Holdbrook will be boss of Las Rosas in the morning."

"And who do you reckon he's aimin' to boss?"

The son of the pioneer smiled and it was a smile that went straight to the hearts of those men who were so proud of the fact that they rode for Big Boy Morgan. "I guess that is for Holdbrook to demonstrate, Jo."

"I reckon so—well I'm bettin' she'll be some hum-dinger of a demonstration or I don't know Arizona cow punchers."

The others murmured their endorsements of Long Jo's sentiment and expressed their opinions of Holdbrook with strength, clearness, and feeling. This done, Curly said the thing they had all been wanting to say.

"If 'tain't hornin' in none on your business to ask, Mr. Morgan, me an' the boys would like to know what you're aimin' to do after to-morrow?"

"I don't know, boys. I am leaving Las Rosas in the morning. That is as far as I can say."

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"What we're meanin' is, can't you figger no way you can use us?" asked Stub.

"I am sorry, boys, but I am all up in the air. Mr. Holdbrook will want to keep you on here, I suppose."

"Not very long, he won't," murmured Stub.

Morgan turned slowly and going to the two horses that were standing by the gate took Sarco's bridle rein and led him away to the corral. Not a man in the group made a move to follow, nor did one utter a comment. A few minutes later they saw Big Boy riding his own horse and leading Sarco down the hill toward the pasture in the valley.

CHAPTER XX

THE BROTHER OF NORA O'SHEA

FROM that moment when, obeying his positive orders to return Nora to Las Rosas, Indian Pete sent Dolores to bring the Irish girl from the cabin, the Black Canyon foreman did not speak to the man who had brought the message from Zobetser. When the stranger and Holdbrook had explained the terms of her release and the Irish girl had flatly refused to leave the place without Larry, it was Dolores who persuaded her that it was best to go. When Nora protested against Holdbrook's going with her, again it was Dolores who persuaded her to yield. And through it all Indian Pete stood apart, silently listening, watching every face with surly keenness. But when Dolores would have gone with Nora to her horse, which Larry, who was with the men at the corrals below, had saddled, the squaw man stopped her. He spoke in Spanish but his voice and manner together with the Mexican girl's fear made the character of his words obvious. Nora and Holdbrook, who were already going down the path, did not hear but the stranger, who was also starting to follow them, did, and paused to stand beside Dolores at the head of the path watching the scene below.

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As Holdbrook and Nora passed through the gate and started down the canyon, Indian Pete again spoke harshly to the Mexican girl, accompanying his words with a commanding gesture toward the cabin. Dolores hesitated with a frightened, appealing look at the stranger. But another word accompanied by a Spanish oath from the squaw man started her toward the cabin.

Indian Pete was about to go with the girl when the messenger said sharply: "Just a moment."

The Black Canyon foreman turned to face him.

"Have you any word you wish to send to Mr. Zobetser?"

For a full minute Indian Pete glared at him then, without a word, deliberately turned his back and followed Dolores into the cabin.

The stranger, thus left alone, saw the door close behind the man and the girl and turned slowly as if to go down the path to his automobile. Then he paused, hesitated, and again faced toward the cabin.

A muffled cry came from behind that closed door.

The man, at the head of the path, started toward the house, paused and looked down at the men who were lounging about the corral below.

The sound of Pete's voice came from the cabin—not loud enough to be heard by the men at the corral but clearly audible to the listening stranger; and although the squaw man spoke in Spanish, there was no mistaking the anger and menace in his words which were followed by the girl's frightened pleading.

The stranger moved toward the house. To the men at the corral it would merely look as though he

had turned back for a final word with Pete, but the moment he reached a point back from the brow of the hill where he could not be seen by the observers below he quickened his step. At the same instant another cry came from the cabin—a low, muffled scream of terror which ended in a choking groan.

The stranger broke into a run and without an instant's pause threw open the cabin door and dashed into the room.

In one corner the squaw crouched on the floor, cowering close to the wall. At the other end of the room Indian Pete held the struggling Mexican girl by the throat.

"I told you what I'd do," the squaw man growled as he shook the slender form of his victim with brutal strength. "You let that Irish girl take Holdbrook away from you and lost me my chance at Las Rosas on purpose, you—"

A hand fell on his shoulder.

Without releasing his grasp on the girl's throat he looked around.

"Stop it!" said the stranger sharply, stepping back a pace.

Indian Pete, with a snarl, flung Dolores half way across the room and faced the intruder. He did not speak but the deadly menace of those close-set eyes warned the other man of his danger, and the stranger started to draw a gun from the side pocket of his coat. But the man of the cities, unskilled in the handling of such weapons, was not quick enough. With vicious strength the Black Canyón foreman leaped and struck. The blow landed with crushing

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force on the stranger's chin. The gun flew from his hand, and he fell against the wall, dropping limp and half unconscious to the floor, where he lay huddled in an inert heap with his face hidden in his arms.

Indian Pete, without taking his eyes from that form on the floor, waited.

Presently the man stirred then, as consciousness returned to him, he raised his head and moved so that he lay with his back to the wall.

With an exclamation the squaw man leaned forward.

The stranger lifted himself weakly to a sitting position with his back to the wall.

An oath and a snarling laugh came from Indian Pete and he stretched forth his hand pointing to the face of the man on the floor who was now looking up at him. That staggering blow of Pete's fist and the crashing fall against the wall had dislodged the stranger's dark glasses and with more startling effect had torn a false beard loose from one side of his face.

As the meaning of Pete's pointing finger dawned upon him the man on the floor put his hand to his face. Instantly he understood. With a quick jerk he removed the false beard and revealed clearly the countenance of Charlie Gray.

"I knowed there was something funny about you," growled Pete with a snarling satisfaction. "If Holdbrook hadn't been so sure you was all right, you couldn't near a-fooled me. I reckon I can fix it though." And with that, there was a wicked-

looking knife in his hand, and he began moving warily toward Gray, who was struggling to his feet.

The unarmed man, weak from the effect of that stunning blow, could have offered but little resistance to his would-be murderer, but at the very moment of the squaw man's attack the situation was changed with startling quickness. Larry O'Shea stepped through the open door. Pete, with his back to the door and intent upon his murderous purpose, was unaware of the Irishman's presence until a blow from Larry's gun, well-placed behind the squaw man's ear, stretched him on the floor at Gray's feet.

To relieve the fallen man of his weapons, to snatch a riata from a peg in the wall, and to bind Indian Pete hand and foot, and to improvise a gag for that vicious mouth was, for the Irish lad, the work of a moment. From the now helpless Black Canyon chief Larry turned swiftly toward the door but stopped in his tracks. With her back against the door which she had closed and with Gray's gun which she had snatched from the floor, Dolores was coolly threatening the squaw, who had attempted to go for help.

"'Tis a good girl you are, Dolores—and quick," said Nora's brother. "You may just as well be tellin' that Injun mother of divils that if she so much as breathes out loud, we'll cut the tongue out of her. Mother of God! But we're in a pickle now."

The Mexican girl translated the Irishman's threat and added one of her own, and the squaw slumped down again in her corner.

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When he was satisfied that the squaw would not dare call for help Larry said to Gray: "The saints be my judges, sir, but when I stepped through that door and saw your face and Pete reachin' for you with his knife I near dropped dead with fright. 'Twas Nora whispered to me as she was leavin' that I should look after Dolores, and I was thinkin' about it and watchin' you at the top of the bank when you turned back. You acted to me like there might be something wrong and so I said to the boys I would just come up to the house for a drink of water. God be praised that I got here when I did, but I'm hanged if I know what we're to do next. Our lives are not worth two cents if the rest of this murderin' outfit was to catch us here like this after what's happened already. Tell me, sir, what does it mean, your comin' here with the whiskers and all?"

In a few words Gray explained. After leaving Pablo and the Mexican girl at the ruin Gray had driven to Tucson in Morgan's roadster at a speed which put him in town long before Indian Pete's messenger could arrive. The student had gone straight to Chester Solway, who was the only Tucson man he knew, and the banker had called in the government special agent. The messenger, in his Ford, had been met on the outskirts of the city, placed under arrest and quietly held for safe keeping. The officer wished to take the Black Canyon outfit with the arms and ammunition in their possession; and to arrest Zobetser in Tucson at the same time. The soldiers were at Sasabe. Word had been sent to them but the troopers could not arrive at Indian

Pete's place before late in the afternoon. In the meantime Nora, as Indian Pete's prisoner, was in grave danger and even if nothing happened to her before the attempt to capture the outfit could be made, it was certain that if anything should go wrong when the government men were making the attack on the Black Canyon outfit the Irish girl would be the first to suffer at the hands of the smugglers, who would hold her responsible for their betrayal. It was the realization of the Irish girl's desperate plight that had led Gray with the special agent's assistance to attempt her rescue. He had planned for Dolores, not Holdbrook, to go with Nora to Las Rosas, but Holdbrook and Indian Pete had prevented that while the squaw man's attack upon the Mexican girl had kept Gray himself from leaving the canyon and returning in safety to Arivaca where the officer was waiting.

"Well, sir, and what's to prevent you from going now?" asked Larry. "All you have to do is to walk down to your car as if nothing had happened and drive away."

"And leave you and Dolores here, to face the consequences? Not much!"

"Sure, and Dolores can get away too. Nobody would stop her if she was just to go down to the corral natural like and tell the boys she was goin' to Arivaca for grub."

"And what would you do here alone, Larry?"

The young Irishman answered slowly: "Why, sir, I don't see as that matters now, which ever way you look at it. Of course, I can't help thinkin' how

everything was to be all right with me goin' back to my sister at Las Rosas in the mornin', but now, with them government men all set to take Zobetser and the whole lot of us—well—'tis easy to guess that my time is about up anyway."

"Nonsense, man. What you have done already puts you on the right side. Cheer up—you and I are going to see this thing through together, for Nora's sake. So put your Irish wits to work and tell me how we can hold the fort until the soldiers get here."

When Big Boy Morgan left the Las Rosas men under the umbrella tree, he was moved not only by a desire to be alone but by the instinctive feeling that he must not, just then, meet Jim Holdbrook. He released Sarco in the pasture and then rode on through the west gate and up the hill on that side of the valley. Even at that distance he felt that the cowboys were watching him, and he did not stop until he was over the crest of the ridge and out of sight from the house. Checking his horse in a little hollow between the hills he dismounted and seating himself on the ground under a mesquite tree surrendered himself to his troubled thoughts.

To Jack Morgan, the return of Nora and Holdbrook together from Black Canyon marked the end. The hope, raised by Charlie Gray's explanation of the friendship between the Irish girl and the man who would to-morrow be the master of Las Rosas, was gone. Nora's refusal even to greet her friends was assurance enough that Holdbrook had told the

truth about her visit to Black Canyon and her brother. Big Boy Morgan could not know that the girl's manner had been caused by her fears that if she met her friends at that moment her overwrought nerves might betray her into revealing something which would cost her brother his life.

The ranchman had been sitting there some time when he heard a familiar sound—the rolling beat of a horse's feet—a running horse. Moved, more by that instinct which comes from life-long habits, than by any definite purpose, the man got to his feet and swung into his saddle. The running horse broke over the crest of the ridge beyond the hollow and urged to desperate speed by its rider plunged with long straining leaps down the hillside toward Morgan. It was the Mexican girl on her half-wild pony.

When Dolores saw him sitting there she swung her mount toward him and threw the animal on its haunches. "Señor Morgan—queeck—Señor Gray and Señorita Nora's brother Larry, they are shut in the house at Black Canyon. If you do not go with the Las Rosas cowboys to help, the Black Canyon men, they will kill."

A few terse questions gave Morgan a clear understanding of the situation. "Me, I tell those men who do not know about what ees happen to Pete, that I go to Arivaca for the grub. So I come for you and the Las Rosas cowboys," Dolores finished.

Morgan was thinking. Holdbrook had lied, after all, about Nora. There was still a chance to save Las Rosas.

"You mus' ride queeck, Señor Morgan," cried Dolores. "If it ees discover what ees happen to Pete before the soldiers come, it ees then for Señor Gray and la Señorita's brother too late. Me, I will go on to the house and tell the cowboys so that they will go, too."

"No, no, Dolores, you must not go to Las Rosas for the boys. Holdbrook would know and would escape. He must be arrested to-night with the others."

"*Si*, Señor, but to save Señor Gray and la Señorita Nora's brother you can not go to that Black Canyon alone."

Big Boy laughed—that old reckless laugh of the John Morgan who was by some thought to be unsafe. "Dolores, haven't you friends at Arivaca with whom you could stay to-night?"

"*Si*, Señor. I sometimes do that."

"All right, that is what you must do. Don't worry about Mr. Gray and Larry. I'll take care of all that. No one at Las Rosas must know until the officers are ready—do you understand?"

"*Si*, Señor."

As Big Boy Morgan disappeared over the ridge in the direction of Black Canyon the Mexican girl drew a long breath. "By hell," she murmured softly, "but that Señor Big Boy ees one man. Me, I theenk la Señorita Nora she ees going be ver' happy."

When Gray and Larry, watching from the cabin window, had seen Dolores riding safely down the

canyon on her mission, the Irishman said: "I'm thinkin', sir, 'twould do no harm if I was just to show myself, natural like, to them gentlemen down below. 'Twould never do for them to be gettin' too curious about what had become of me, do you see?"

"Good idea," agreed Gray, "but suppose we fix things in here a bit, first—before we get too busy."

They dragged the now conscious Indian Pete to a position against the front wall where he would be least likely to be seen by any one looking in at the door. By signs and a threatening show of weapons they moved the squaw into the farthest corner and made her understand that her life depended upon her staying there. Then they arranged the few pieces of furniture where they would do the most good.

"Why not leave the door open?" said Gray. "If any one comes up from the path it would help the looks of things. I'll sit back here out of sight and entertain our host and hostess."

"'Tis a great head, for the appearance of things, you have, sir, though I can't say that I'm admirin' so much your taste in whiskers. Besides, it might be handy to have the door as you say in case I was wishful to come in in a hurry."

And so with Larry sitting on a rock in plain sight of the men below, busily engaged in sewing a rent in his jumper, and with the cabin door wide open in case any one should come up the path, they awaited developments.

But it was not long until one of the men at the corral called up to Larry. "Hi—you, Irish—is Pete there?"

"The boss and Mr. Zobetser's pardner are both in the house," called Larry. "What is it that you want?"

"Go ask Pete if we hadn't best be gettin' the stuff in shape to pack so's we can get away soon as it's dark without takin' half the night to get ready."

"But I don't like to be interruptin' the gentlemen when they're talkin'," demurred the Irishman, thus gaining at least another minute of precious time.

"Ah-h-h, to hell with your politeness," called another. "Go ask Pete like I tell you, or I'll be coming up there and tearing another hole in your jumper."

Upon this, Larry rose from the rock and withdrew from their sight. Putting his head in at the door he said to Gray: "Did you hear them, sir? 'Tis beginnin' to wake up they are. But with good luck I'll keep them busy for a spell yet."

When he returned to the brow of the hill he carried the saddle girth which Pete had been mending the day before.

"The boss says you should go ahead and get everything ready for an early start," he called to the men.

"All right," came the answer, "slide along down here and give us a hand."

Larry held up the saddle girth. "But I can't be doin' that right now; the boss, he said for me to fix this for him."

The men disappeared in the shelter where the packages of arms and ammunitions were stored, and

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Larry kept his place on the rock, ostensibly busy at the task assigned to him.

And then, presently, one of the crew, nicknamed "Dogie," came out of the shed in the corral and started up the path. The Irishman, examining the girth in his hand as if to assure himself that his work was well done, rose leisurely and moved toward the house. As he was fixing the girth in its place on the saddle which hung close to one side of the doorway he whispered a warning to Gray. "Whist, sir, there's one of them comin'."

Dogie reached the *olla* that hung on a post of the *ramada* and stopped for a drink of water. As he hung the gourd dipper again on its nail he remarked casually that he wanted to ask Pete about something and started forward to enter the house; but the Irishman was now standing on the threshold leaning carelessly against one side of the doorway.

"Wait a bit, Dogie," he said in a low tone. "I'm thinkin' you would better not be disturbin' the boss just now."

The smuggler halted and stood gazing at the Irishman for a moment, too surprised to speak. "What's the matter?" he said at last. "Is Pete and his royal highness a-takin' tea with the lady of the house?"

Larry delayed his reply as long as possible. Every second was of value.

"What's wrong with you, can't you talk?" demanded the puzzled Dogie.

"I don't know about the tea, Dogie, but 'tis sure I am that the boss and Mr. Zobetser's pardner do be

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havin' a very important conference and are wishful not to be disturbed. 'Tis so they give me to understand when I asked them about gettin' ready a little while ago."

"Well I'm damned," muttered the astounded Dogie. Then, as the possibilities of the situation dawned upon him he drew back a few paces. Suddenly he raised his voice. "Pete—hi—Pete, are you in there?"

Larry saw the smuggler's right hand move toward his gun and before Dogie had definitely decided to draw the weapon from its holster the Irishman was inside the cabin.

With his own gun in hand Larry whispered to Gray. "Be ready, sir, if he's fool enough to come in we'll bag him along with Pete."

But Dogie was too wise to enter that open door.

Retreating to the head of the path, he yelled to the men at the corral below: "Come up here, you all—an' come a-runnin'. There's something ain't right in this camp."

When he looked again toward the house the door was closed.

The two men in the cabin listened as the smugglers from the corral rushed up the path in answer to Dogie's call.

"'Tis some excited they are," commented Larry. "If they'll only palaver long enough, their talk may save us yet."

"Sh-h—here they come," whispered Gray, gripping his companion's arm in his excitement.

The sounds of the smugglers' approach ceased

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and a voice close to the door said: "Open up, Larry, you might as well, 'cause we're a comin' in anyway."

Larry whispered to the student: "Do you take a look from the window, sir, to see if there's anybody comin' up the canyon—Dolores has not reached Las Rosas yet, but it might be the soldiers have made better time than was expected."

As Gray crossed the room the Irishman called to those in front of the door: "Sure, there's no use at all in your bein' in such a hurry, Dogie. 'Tis as I told you, the boss is engaged and that busy he can't see you now."

Larry's words were punctuated by the report of a Colt forty-five from the rear of the cabin and a bullet crashed through the window within an inch or two of Gray's head.

"For the love of God, sir, don't be stickin' your face up for a target like that," said Larry.

They listened to the murmur of voices as the shot was explained, then again came the command: "Open the door, you fellows. We've fooled with you long enough."

"Presently, Dogie, presently," Larry returned. "Don't be so impatient—'tis like to lead you into trouble and there's no good in it at all."

"All right, boys," cried the spokesman outside. "Fetch up that log. We're a-comin' in, Larry."

The Irishman faced his companion. "They mean that, sir. We've only as long as the door will hold. When they're in, mind that you shoot to kill. Make no mistake—'tis them or us."

Gray sprang across the room to the window. One

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look and he was back at Larry's side. "They're coming, boy—the troopers are coming up the canyon."

"Glory be! They're ridin' up the canyon, you say? That means they have the place already surrounded, sir. Please God, they'll not be too slow closin' in."

A crashing blow on the door put an end to all conversation in the cabin. Behind their frail barricade of furniture the two men waited, watched the door as it gave to the weight of the log in the hands of the smugglers, and listened for the relief that was so near at hand. One more swing of the improvised battering ram would carry the door.

"Don't be backward, sir," cried Larry. "Let them have it as quick as you can see them."

But as the smugglers were drawing back for the final blow the two men inside heard the sharp command: "Hands up." There was a confused murmur of voices—oaths—sharp words of authority—the noise of trampling feet. For a moment Larry listened, then he smiled. "Faith, 'tis all over now, sir."

Gray started eagerly for the door but the Irishman stopped him. "Wait a minute, if you please, sir. I'll just be goin' first."

"Going?" echoed Gray.

The young man's eyes were blazing with excitement. "Of course, I'm goin'— Sure, sir, and I could do no less than stand with you as long as there was need because of the good friend you are to my sister, as Dolores has told me and as I have myself seen this day, but you can't expect me to stay here

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to be handcuffed like they're doin' to the rest of them out there, and then to be dragged away to prison. Is it crazy you are or do you be thinkin' that I am?"

"You are not going anywhere," Gray protested. "You will stay right here and see this thing through. They'll not treat you like the others when they know how you turned against the whole outfit. For Nora's sake listen to reason, boy."

The young Irishman's face was deathly, and his voice shook: "And do you think, sir, if I was to give evidence against them, that I've been one with in all that they've done, that I could live for hate of myself? Sure, 'twould be worse for me free than it would be for them in prison. No, sir, if I stop now I must go with the boys, and that's a thing I'll never do—I'll never put on my sister Nora the shame of havin' her brother in prison, and I'll not put on her the shame of the other thing—which is worse. So 'tis good-by to you, sir, and if you'll be so kind, you can just be tellin' Nora how I stood with you against them. It will make it easier for her to know."

He slipped through the window and an instant later disappeared among the rocks back of the cabin. Gray threw open the door and stepped out, thinking to engage the attention of the government men for a moment or two and thus give Larry a little time. When he had explained how he had been detained at the canyon, the officer sent two men into the cabin for Indian Pete and the Irishman. A moment later the men called from the doorway: "There's not a soul in here except a fat old Indian woman."

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The squaw had lost no time freeing her lord and master.

"They won't get far," said the officer. "There's a trooper on guard a little way down the canyon and another at the corral."

Even as he spoke there came a shout from below. The soldier stationed at the corral had caught sight of a man climbing up the wall of the canyon.

Leaving two of their number to guard the prisoners the government men scattered along the bench on which the cabin stood and from various points of view searched the rocky heights above. With so many eyes watching from so many angles it was only a moment or two until the man climbing among the rocks was seen again. It was Larry.

The Irishman, in working his way up the steep side of the canyon, had taken advantage of a recess in the wall which had enabled him to conceal his movements from the men in front of the house. But when he had reached a certain elevation he was in the line of vision of the soldier standing on the canyon floor and looking over the edge of the bench from which the fugitive had started to climb. The shout which announced that he was discovered, and the movements of the men about the house on the bench, urged him to a desperate effort which brought him quickly to the top of the friendly recess. To climb higher meant to climb in full view of the men below. To retreat meant certain capture. Nor could he stay where he was—for the man at the corral could still see him and was shouting directions to the others.

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A narrow ledge on the opposite side of the recess caught his eye. The rocky shelf seemed to lead around a cliff which at this point buttressed the canyon wall. If he could make his way by that ledge to the other side of the cliff, he might find a safe route to the top. Except on the outer face of the cliff where the little path disappeared behind a rock which overhung the edge of the narrow shelf, he would be exposed to the gaze of the eager watchers below who had already glimpsed him as he was gaining his precarious position.

Summoning all his strength for the effort, the Irishman gained the ledge. The shout which went up from the men below told him that he was seen and that he could do nothing now but go on. With the recklessness born of his desperate position he ran along the ledge and dropped behind that sheltering rock. He was again hidden from the men below but a glance ahead revealed to Larry himself that the narrow path had betrayed him. The ledge ended abruptly. From the point where he crouched behind the rock the cliff was sheer. He was trapped. The trooper on guard a little way down the canyon had ridden closer and from where he now sat on his horse could see Larry's position clearly, and shouted the information to the others.

The government agent called up to the man on the cliff above: "You might as well come down, O'Shea, we've got you anyway."

Larry's head appeared above the rock behind which he crouched. "To hell with you," he retorted briefly.

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"You can't get off that ledge without coming this way," said the officer—not at all unkindly.

The Irishman's reply brought a smile to the face of every man below. "I'm very comfortable where I am, thank you, sir."

"We'll have to go up and get you, then."

Larry's gun now appeared resting on the rock and trained on the path by which he had reached his position. "If you come up, you'll have to climb the way I did and one at a time. I'm sorry, sir, but if you drive me to it I'll kill every damn man of you."

The officer turned to Gray. "He can do it, too."

Gray called up to the Irishman: "Don't be foolish, Larry, you don't want to hurt anybody. These men are only doing their duty."

"You're right, sir, and 'tis sorry for them I am as well as for myself. I'll do no more than they force me to do. But as true as God sees us now He knows if you yourself, sir, was to climb up here to take me I'd kill you before you put your foot on the other end of this little shelf where I'm sittin'."

The government men discussed the situation. The Irishman was protected from the rear by the cliff. There was no possible way to bring a gun to bear on him and no way to reach him except by the way which he held. They were in the midst of their deliberations when Big Boy Morgan rode up the canyon and dismounting at the corral climbed the path to the level above.

When the situation was explained to him the ranchman looked up at Larry who was watching the movement below.

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"Good evening to you, Mr. Morgan," called the Irishman coolly. "'Tis good time you made gettin' here though it would be too late to help your friend, Mr. Gray, if these gentlemen had not happened in when they did."

"I did the best I could, Larry. But what are you doing up there?"

"Why, sir, you must know I'm just tryin' to take care of Nora O'Shea's brother."

Morgan moved away from the group of men and drew nearer the foot of the wall. "All right," he said coolly; "come on down now and let me take care of Nora O'Shea's brother for awhile."

"Oh, sir, Mr. Morgan, please, sir, don't you be talkin' to me like that."

Big Boy went another step or two toward the wall. "Come on—it'll be all right, Larry."

The poor fellow's voice trembled with eagerness: "Do you mean, sir, that they'll not be arrestin' me?"

"I'm sorry, Larry, but I can't promise that."

The answer was a wild cry for the strain on the Irishman's nerves was beginning to tell. "Then 'tis you can go to hell with the rest of them before I stir a foot."

Morgan's voice was calm and steady. "All right, Larry, I'll be with you in a minute." He started deliberately forward.

"Mr. Morgan," screamed Larry, "for the love of God, sir, don't make me do it."

Charlie Gray said in a low voice: "Hold on, Jack, don't try that—it's too great a risk. The poor devil is crazy—it's a hundred to one he'll shoot."

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The others added their protest. But as if he had not heard them Big Boy Morgan coolly unbuckled his belt and held up his gun for Larry to see. Then he placed the weapon on a nearby rock and stepped forward unarmed. "Here I come, Larry," he said with a smile and began to climb from rock to rock up the canyon wall.

In a deathlike silence the men watched. Not a man moved. Larry's head disappeared behind the rock. Big Boy climbed steadily on.

Morgan had reached a point just below the ledge when Larry suddenly stood erect. "Stop where you are, I say, or I'll let you have it." He raised his weapon.

And the son of John Morgan, looking up at him, laughed, and drew himself up onto the ledge. "You can't do it, Larry," he said calmly. "You know you can't. Nora O'Shea's brother isn't going to kill any one, and I'm not going to let any one kill you. You made a fool of yourself just as every man does, in one way or another, and you are going to pay for it like a man—for your sister's sake. Then you'll be able to make up to her a little for what you have already done."

As he spoke the last word he began moving steadily toward the half-crazed Irishman.

For a moment Larry held his gun pointing full at Morgan's breast then, as Big Boy continued to advance, the Irishman with a wild cry of despair threw the weapon from him and bursting into tears sank to his knees. The next moment Big Boy Morgan had him in his arms.

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A hearty cheer from the men below echoed from the canyon walls but neither Morgan nor Larry heard.

Presently, when the Irishman had regained, in a measure, control of his nerves, the watchers below saw that they were about to begin the descent. Then suddenly, just when a tragedy had, by Morgan's reckless courage, been averted, the thing happened.

They saw Morgan turn and look down over the end of the ledge where Larry had been trapped into that recession in the canyon wall which the Irishman had been trying to gain. They saw him leap forward suddenly, as if something had attracted his attention. Then, as if Morgan had spoken, Larry turned and looked. At the same instant a shot came from the other side of the cliff. But Nora's brother had caught Morgan and whirled him back from the edge of the ledge so that his own body, covering the ranchman, received the bullet that was meant for Big Boy.

Unnoticed by Larry, whose attention had been held so closely by the men below, and hidden by the rocks from those who were watching the Irishman, Indian Pete had awaited the outcome of the attempt to arrest Nora's brother. When Morgan saw him the desperate squaw man realized that his opportunity to escape was gone, and fired.

Big Boy's movements following the shot and Larry's fall were instantaneous. Unarmed and in plain view of the smuggler who was lying among the rocks only a few feet away and below, he did the only thing possible—jumped straight at the

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man who was bent on killing him. Another shot echoed and reëchoed from the canyon walls, but the bullet flattened harmlessly against the cliff where the ranchman had been standing. It was not much of a struggle, for Big Boy landed upon the squaw man with such terrific force that there was no fight left in the would-be murderer and a few minutes later he was handcuffed with his Black Canyon crew.

It was not easy to bring the wounded and unconscious Larry down from the ledge, and night had come when the difficult task was finally accomplished. A brief examination under the lights of the automobile which had brought Gray into the canyon convinced them that the wounded man should be taken without a moment's unnecessary delay to the hospital. When they had arranged, as best they could, with blankets and bedding from the cabin to protect him from the motion of the machine over the rough roads, Morgan and Gray started with Larry for Tucson.

CHAPTER XXI

JULY FIRST

THE following morning, Nora was in her room at Las Rosas gathering her few things together, ready to make them into the bundle which she had brought with her from Ireland.

The absence of Morgan and Gray caused no anxiety because every one knew that Gray had gone to town in Morgan's roadster, and the last they had seen of Big Boy he was riding over the hill the way they usually went to Arivaca when they went through the valley pasture. They supposed that the ranchman had secured a car in Arivaca and had gone to his friends in Tucson, which would be, for him, not unusual. But to Nora the absence of Morgan and Gray meant that they did not wish to see her again. They were wrong in believing that she had given herself to Holdbrook, of course, but she was glad that they were not at home that morning because now that she knew about Larry she could not bear to face them.

She did not know where she was going. She did not care. Larry would be with her presently, for to-day was the day Holdbrook became master of Las Rosas and the price of her silence was that her brother should leave Black Canyon and come to

her that morning. But Larry should not stay at Las Rosas with Holdbrook—she could not endure that. She, herself, must leave the ranch at once and Larry should go with her. They would go far away somewhere where they could begin all over again. That was clearly the only thing for them to do. Perhaps in time it would be easier, but it was not easy now. As the Irish girl moved about that room—Morgan's room—his mother's room—and touched the objects that were so intimately associated with him and that were now so familiar to her she wondered if there would be years enough to help her bear the memory of her dreams that must now remain always only dreams.

The windows of her room were open, and she heard the voices of the cowboys who were on the bunk house porch and under the umbrella tree. Then she heard Holdbrook, who had evidently come to the end of the ranch house veranda, say: "Morgan has explained to you men that I am in charge here now, I take it?"

It was Stub who replied with pointed emphasis: "*Mister Morgan 'lowed you'd want to see us all this mornin'. You'll do your own explainin', I take it.*"

The voices were louder now than when the cowboys had been talking to one another, and the Irish girl heard every word. Nor could she refrain, under the circumstances, from listening with intense interest.

Holdbrook, overlooking the peculiarities of Stub's answer, addressed them in the manner of one assuming the dignity of a high official: "I may as

well tell you men in the beginning that I expect to make some radical changes in the methods and policies of Las Rosas."

Long Jo answered this with elaborate and deferential interest: "We all 'lowed as how you'd be sure to introduce some Philadelphia ideas on handlin' this here Arizona cow ranch."

"I shall certainly introduce more modern business methods," returned the new boss, "and I may as well tell you all right now that my first purpose will be to improve the service and build up the morale of the organization."

"You hear that, Bill?" cried Stub reproachfully. "You pie-faced old reprobate. I allus told you your morales was somethin' scandalous."

"Morales!" shouted Curly. "Bill, he jest naturally ain't got no morales a-tall."

Stub continued mournfully: "The way you been a-carryin' on with that there red-headed gal at the ice-cream emporium in Tucson is somethin' awful in a man o' your age, Bill."

Maricopa Bill hung his head and shuffled his feet in shame. "I warn't meanin' no harm, honest to God, I warn't."

Holdbrook cleared his throat uneasily—the response to his suggested improvement was almost too enthusiastic.

Stub continued reproaching the grizzly haired cowboy. "An' look how you misbehaved yourself with that skinny waitress at the Stag Restaurant."

Bill squirmed with embarrassment—at least it looked that way to the new master of Las Rosas.

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"An' that dinky little Chink gal in old You Chin's place," said Curly.

"An' that Mexican gal in Tamale Jim's," said Stub.

"An' that long, tall, wide-out woman cashier at the hotel," murmured Curly.

"Yes, an' even that big, black baby what cooks for the X Bar X outfit," mourned Stub.

At this last shot, Maricopa Bill straightened up with a quick air of indignant protest.

Curly solemnly added the finishing touch: "We all trusts that you realize now, Bill, as how we've jest naturally got to have some sort of morales at El Rancho de Las Rosas."

Maricopa Bill turned away as if too ashamed to look the new boss in the face.

Long Jo addressed himself gravely to Holdbrook: "You can see how the boys all sure appreciate the fact, sir, that the morales of Las Rosas ain't been, as you may say, jest up to the high an' lofty standards what *you* was raised to."

Holdbrook was not now quite so sure in his grasp of the situation. "Very well," he said at last, "that will be all for the present. I am going to Arivaca, and when I return we will take up ranch matters more definitely."

"Yes, sir."

"We sure will."

"Long Jo will be in charge as usual until I return. Jo, have some one get my horse ready."

"Pablo," barked Jo with the manner of a top sergeant, "Go get me Mr. Holdbrook's horse."

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The vaquero smilingly rolled a cigarette. "Señor Holdbrook's horse, he no can go Arivaca this day, Long Jo."

Holdbrook, who was turning away, faced the Mexican with a sharp: "What's that?"

Pablo explained gently: "That horse you all time ride, he go bad lame. No good for this day."

"Well, get me another horse then."

Pablo leisurely applied a match to his cigarette and exhaled a cloud of smoke. "Which other one you want? You ride any horse I bring, heh?"

"No, I won't ride any horse you bring," snapped Holdbrook.

"Every horse in *my* string is plumb wore out," said Curly promptly. "Ain't fit to go a mile, with all the work of tallyin' cattle an' everything."

Stub caught his cue. "I done rode the hooves clean off of all mine."

And Maricopa Bill came in with: "Ain't one o' mine can much more'n walk."

Pablo exhaled another cloud of smoke. "Me, I think better you ride one my bronco bunch, Señor. They not wore out yet. Pretty wild, mebbby. Mebbby buck little. You get him headed toward Arivaca an' stay with him, he take you there all right—pretty quick I bet."

This was a little too evident. Holdbrook's face flamed. "Look here, you men. I've had enough of this. I'll be back here in ten minutes; if I don't find a decent horse ready for me, I'll discharge every man of you. I'll show you what sort of service I expect on this ranch." He stalked majestically the

length of the veranda and disappeared around the corner of the house.

The cowboys grinned. "Now look what you've gone an' done, Bill," mourned Stub.

And Curly inquired sadly: "Can't you be satisfied with bein' plumb unmorale that you jest naturally got to go an' be indecent to the new boss?"

Stub continued severely: "You ought to be plumb humiliated at yourself the way you've done gone an' got him all peeved up."

"An' him such a nice gentleman, too," finished Curly. "You'll be more careful in the future, Bill, I take it."

The grinning subject of this pointed criticism asked mildly: "Do you all reckon he'll try footin' it to Arivaca?"

"Me, I think I get him on bad horse, have some fun, heh? Mebby break his dam neck."

The arrival of two automobiles at the big gate put an end to their consideration of Holdbrook's problem. Charlie Gray was alone in the first car—Morgan's roadster. The second was occupied by two strangers. The men under the umbrella tree watched the machines as they came across the big yard and stopped in front of the house. Gray, followed closely by the strangers, approached the cowboys, and the Las Rosas riders, as they saw the face of the man who had won so large a measure of their admiration and esteem, became very still.

"Good morning, boys," said Gray soberly. "Is Holdbrook on the place?"

Long Jo answered: "Yes, sir, he's done took

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charge. He was here tellin' us about it jest before you showed up. He'll be back in a minute, I reckon."

At that moment Holdbrook, himself, appeared. Coming to the end of the veranda he nodded to Gray with a curt greeting but pointedly ignored the two strangers. "Well, Jo," he said sharply, "is my horse ready?"

Before Long Jo could answer one of the strangers stepped forward. "Are you James Holdbrook?"

"I am. What can I do for you?"

His manner was quite superior and his tone was meant to impress every man present with his authority.

The stranger smiled grimly. "You can go with me to Tucson." As he spoke he turned back the lapel of his coat and revealed the badge of his office. "You are under arrest by the United States Government for smuggling arms and ammunition into Mexico."

Jim Holdbrook drew back a step and turned to find the other stranger on the veranda close beside him. "Is this a joke?" he demanded with a ghastly smile.

The officer replied sternly: "We captured every man at Black Canyon with the goods last night; and Jake Zobetser with his associates in Tucson were arrested at the same time."

He took handcuffs from his pocket and stepped closer to his prisoner. Mechanically Jim Holdbrook held out his hands.

As the steel bracelets snapped about the wrists of the new master of Las Rosas a woman's scream came through the open window of Nora's room.

CHAPTER XXII

HAPPINESS

IN a room in Saint Mary's Hospital, where the gentle sisters minister not alone to the stricken bodies of their patients but to wounded souls as well, Nora found her brother with Big Boy Morgan watching beside his bed.

But there was nothing that could be done now for Larry O'Shea—the skill of the surgeons, the care and sympathy of the sisters, the grief of Big Boy Morgan, the love and devotion and sacrifice of the girl who had been to him, all his life, both sister and mother—nothing could keep him now in this world which he never had the strength to withstand alone.

As the Irish girl entered the room, sustained by that wonderful strength which was her heritage, Morgan and Gray, who knew better than the others her love for her brother, marveled at her calmness.

Since that terrible moment in Black Canyon the stricken man had given no sign of consciousness, but when his sister touched his forehead with her lips and whispered: "Larry, Larry boy," he opened his eyes and smiled. As if her love was still potent to supply him with the strength which in himself he lacked, he said: "'Tis all right, mavourneen. I was just dreamin' of the old home. 'Twas as if I was

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back again in our little cabin with the straw thatched roof, and the vines over the door, and the mother sittin' in her chair. Sure, I could smell the smoke of the peat burnin', and you, mavourneen, was singin' at your work, and—then—all at once—here you are. 'Tis a queer thing it is—but 'tis all right, Nora darlin', with you so close to me." He turned his eyes toward Morgan and again smiled up into the face of his sister-mother. "Sure, and everything will be all right now."

It was an afternoon several weeks later when Big Boy Morgan, riding from a distant watering place to the corral, turned aside to stop at the little pond in the pasture where he had talked with Nora that day after his last reckless party in town. For some time the young ranchman sat on his horse watching the cattle, then he dismounted and stretched himself on the ground in the shade of a mesquite tree with the air of one who finds the hours too long.

At Jim Holdbrook's request Morgan had remained in charge of Las Rosas until the future of the ranch should be decided. The cowboys, of course, were staying on with Big Boy. Nora and Gray were still in Tucson.

From that moment of his arrest, when the agony of Nora's cry had reached his heart, Jim Holdbrook had been like one who walked with death. Through the days when he was in jail awaiting trial he sent several times for Charlie Gray and with him talked at length. And the student, who had so utterly

despised the man, came strangely to feel for him a very real sympathy and understanding.

Big Boy Morgan was aroused from his brooding revery by the sight of a white horse coming over the hill. It was Sarco—and that rider who was carried so proudly by the old prince of El Rancho de Las Rosas—surely there was only one who had the right—who would dare— Big Boy Morgan sprang to his feet. “Where in the world did you come from?” he managed to say when Nora stopped her horse beside him. “Or am I dreaming again?”

In his excitement the man did not notice the significance of his words, but the Irish girl did, and her cheeks glowed with color and her eyes shone with happiness.

“’Tis myself, no less. Sure, I was that lonesome for a sight of—of the boys, and the ranch, and Sarco, that I just begged Charlie Gray so hard to bring me home that he could do no less.”

She slipped from the saddle before he could offer to help her dismount, and together they sat down on the bank above the pool where she had gone to him that other day when his need of her had been so great.

“’Twas Wing Foo told me you were out with the cattle somewhere, and ’twas Pablo knew you would be coming home this way and saddled Sarco for me so I could ride to meet you. And isn’t it wonderful about the happiness of Pablo and Dolores? Faith, the boy could not wait to tell me how they had been to the priest and how you had helped them to their little home.”

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Big Boy Morgan could not speak. He wanted to cry out to her his joy in her presence. He wanted to tell her his love. There seemed to be nothing else for him to say. But he had sternly told himself that as long as his future was so uncertain he must not ask the woman he loved to share it.

"You will stay at Las Rosas? I mean, you have come back to live with us again?" he asked stupidly.

"Why, sir, as for that I don't know," she answered demurely. "It all depends."

"Of course—I understand. No one knows now what is to happen to Las Rosas. I'm only here waiting and looking after things from day to day—but won't you stay as long as you can?"

"'Tis glad I'll be to stay as long as you want me, sir."

As long as he wanted her! Big Boy made a mighty effort to control himself. "I suppose I'll be hearing from Holdbrook's lawyer about the ranch any day now," he said slowly. "They might—it's only a chance—but they might want me to stay on as manager."

"And would you?"

"Yes, I would. I have been thinking it all over and—well, I feel that it's my job."

"Of course 'tis your job," she said heartily. Then she added with a wistful smile: "'Tis myself that'll have to be looking for a job presently. If you should be staying on as the boss of Las Rosas, I suppose you would not by any chance be wanting to hire a washer woman—or—or—something?"

This was too much. In spite of his resolve that

he would not speak of love to Nora until his wretched affairs were settled, Big Boy Morgan surrendered.

It was some time later when the Irish girl said: "Well, now that we've settled that, after me doing everything, even to asking you for the job, I've a message for you."

"A message for me—from whom?"

"'Tis from Mr. Holdbrook's lawyers. It was Charlie Gray brought it to me this morning—just before we started for Las Rosas."

"You say the message is for me, but Charlie brought it to you?"

"Why—well—'tis in the way of being for both of us, do you see?"

"About the ranch, I suppose. All right, let's have it. They can't hurt me now." There was a touch of the old Morgan recklessness in his words and manner, but it was a happy recklessness.

"'Tis in the pocket of the saddle," she said and watched him with a happy smile as he went to Sarco.

He brought back to her a legal-looking envelope and together they examined the contents. The letter, from a Tucson attorney, explained:

DEAR MR. MORGAN: We are herewith enclosing a transfer to you from James Holdbrook, Jr., of his interest in El Rancho de Las Rosas.

Mr. Holdbrook has explained to us how his father came into possession of this controlling interest in your ranch, and it was through us that the transfer was made from Holdbrook, Sr., to his son, who accepted the gift without

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fulfilling the conditions under which his father promised it to him.

Considering all the facts in the case, we see no reason why you should hesitate to accept this transfer from Mr. Holdbrook. On the contrary, there is every reason why you should.

With hearty congratulations.

"But Nora, dear, I don't understand," exclaimed Big Boy. "Why has he done this?"

The girl's face was grave as she answered gently: "I can explain it all to you, now, as I could not have done an hour ago." She took an envelope from the pocket of her jacket and gave it to him. "You have the right, now, to read this."

It was a note from Holdbrook to her, written the day he was sentenced, and sent to her by Gray.

I have restored Las Rosas to Jack Morgan because I know your love for him and his love for you, and I wish for you both the happiness which my own life has denied me.

It will help me through the years of my punishment to reflect that after this proof, you will no longer doubt the sincerity of my love—the only thing in all my miserable, misguided life in which I have been absolutely sincere.

When they rode together to the ranch house, the long shadows lay across the sea of grama grass. The sun was almost touching the top of Yellow Jacket Peak, and the files of cattle were coming to the big pond under the hill for their evening drink.

Wing Foo, Charlie Gray, the cowboys, and Dolores were all waiting under the umbrella tree. Gray had told them that Big Boy Morgan's inheritance had been restored to him and that they were not to leave

HAPPINESS

Las Rosas. The greeting they gave to their boss and the Irish girl was, as Stub said, "a humdinger."

But when Big Boy told them awkwardly that Nora was to stay at Las Rosas always, Long Jo felt called to testify.

"Mr. Morgan, sir, I jest want to say that me an' the boys are plumb unanimous an' almighty proud at the judgment you've showed in pickin' Nora to be your missus. Fact is, ma'am," he continued to Nora, "if you'd 'a' asked us about it there ain't nobody in this here outfit what wouldn't 'a' picked Big Boy to be your man—that is, in course, next to ourselves we'd 'a' picked him. What I'm a-meanin' is, we sure are wishin' you happiness a heap."

"Good boy, Jo!"

"That's right!"

"*Está bueno*—it ees sure thing as hell, me, I know."

"You bet yer life!"

"Me sabe—Boss Big Bloy, him no catch um happness, nobody catch um happness. Boss Big Bloy, him catch um Missee Nola evlybody catch um happness—that mo bette. Me catch um suppee now."

"*Si*. It ees that la Señorita Nora ees to be la Señora of El Rancho de las Rosas what make for everybody the happiness—*si*, it ees so—jus' like she ees all the time teach to me how the love it ees everything."

THE END

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